



THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION
DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 56.

Price, Five Cents.

BUFFALO BILL'S MASCOT

OR
THE MYSTERY OF DEATH VALLEY

JAS. McKERNAN'S Cigar, Tobacco, Book and Candy
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208 WEST ADAMS ST. NEAR MORGAN CHICAGO



BY
THE AUTHOR
OF 'BUFFALO BILL'

BUFFALO BILL TURNED IN HIS SADDLE AND SENT A DOZEN SHOTS FROM HIS WINCHESTER RATTLING BACK UP THE HILL AT THE SAVAGES.



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No. 56.

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BUFFALO BILL'S MASCOT;

The Mystery of Death Valley.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

THE VALLEY OF DEATH.

Just as the sun was sinking below the mountain horizon in Arizona, a horseman halted upon a ridge, which he had ascended from a trackless, barren plain, where neither bush, grass, tree nor stream was visible, and gazed upon the scene there spread out before him.

"Is this one of those mirages of this wild land, of which I have heard so much, or is it in reality a scene of beauty, a fertile valley?" muttered the horseman as he sat upon his horse and gazed upon a beautiful valley spread out before him. Beyond, far beyond, was a range of lofty mountains, and upon either side of him were the ridges of hills which formed the vale.

A river ran winding through the valley, with trees fringing its banks, and here and there were pretty

bits of scenery to tempt the eye of one who loved nature.

"A far better place in which to spend the night, old horse, than what we had anticipated having, after our long and dreary ride across yonder desert.

"They say this spot is one to avoid, and the trappers call it Death Valley, while several of the scouts at the fort have named it the Valley of Jim-Jams.

"It is to leave all hope behind to enter here, to die without knowing why, and to see strange sights there is no accounting for, I have been told.

"Some say that the place is haunted by evil spirits, others that it is the abode of a demon race of Indians, and I know men avoid it as they would a pestilence.

"Well, that is just what brought me here, to solve the mystery, to know the truth or falsity of the tales I have heard, so we will press on, old horse, and find a camping-place for the night, for we dread the treeless, waterless desert behind us far more than all

the evil spirits that may haunt this spot of beauty before us, do we not?

"Come, old pard, it is getting dark, so we must hunt a camp for the night."

So saying, the horseman rode over the ridge, and making his own trail started down into the valley toward the river.

He was splendidly mounted upon a large, long-bodied, clean-limbed bay, whose every look indicated great speed and endurance, and his trappings showed that he was out upon an extended scout, as he carried a roll of blankets, a bag of provisions, and saddle pockets well filled.

The rider was a man of majestic appearance, for he was as erect in bearing as an Indian, had a slender, wiry form, broad shoulders, and rode like one whose life had been passed in the saddle.

A buckskin hunting shirt, leggings stuck in the tops of high cavalry boots, and a broad-brimmed sombrero of terra-cotta hue completed his costume, which was striking and picturesque.

He had a lariat hanging upon one side of his saddle horn, a repeating rifle upon the other, and a belt encircled his waist in which there were two large revolvers and a bowie knife.

If the general appearance of the man was striking, his face was more so, for his features were clear-cut, formed in a refined and expressive mold, his eyes large, full of feeling and fire, and a mustache and imperial gave him a military look, which his bearing and seat in the saddle carried out.

His was a face to see and never forget. It was Buffalo Bill, the scout, guide and Indian fighter, and he was venturing alone, with night upon him, into the weird land known as the Valley of Death.

Buffalo Bill was well equipped with his outfit for camping, his arms and horse, for a scouting expedition, a fight or flight.

He was a man who never knew fear, and, if brought face to face with death, would meet it with a courage that was indomitable, a smile of perfect resignation.

His career upon the frontier from boyhood had made him a man long before he got out of his teens, and death had been daily by his side, sufferings, hardships and battling for life a part of his existence.

He had heard of this weird spot known as the Valley of Death, and was determined to visit it, where all others shunned it.

It was said to be a spot avoided by Indians in spite

of its beauty of scenery, as though the abode of Evil Spirits, and red hunters and trappers who had gone there had wild stories to tell of how the very air was poisoned and deadly vapors arose from the ground to destroy those who camped there.

There were others born in superstition, who asserted that the valley was really haunted, and stories of how an emigrant train had once gone there to secure a home, glad to have found such an Eden of rest and beauty and not one had ever left it alive to tell the tale of the fatality that had befallen them.

Trappers had gone there and never returned.

Indians, retreating from a raid and pursued by soldiers, had ventured into the valley by night and never reappeared.

Two or more scouts from the fort had never returned from trails they had gone upon, and they had been tracked to Death Valley.

So it was that the shadow of death hung over the valley, which was many miles in length, half a dozen or more in width, and as fertile as a garden.

Game going there was surely safe from the hunter, and so the scout expected to find in plenty there deer, antelope and other wild animals.

An oasis it was in a desert, for the barren, treeless, grassless, waterless plains of Arizona surrounded the fertile vale, with its stream that rose amid its hills and sunk from sight in the sandy lands beyond, its lakes, its springs and woodland.

The twilight deepened as Buffalo Bill descended the tree-dotted slope toward a distant peak, which his gaze had fallen upon from the ridge, and where he knew he would find in plenty wood, water and grass.

He had turned his field glass upon the very spot he wanted for a camp, and though darkness was overtaking him he knew that he could find it.

"I am sorry we were not an hour sooner, pard; as we could have been camped before nightfall," he said to his horse, to whom he talked as though a human creature.

Down into the valley he went, and, reaching the stream, held along its banks for the distance of a couple of miles.

Night had come on, but the stars guided his way, and it was not very dark.

Reaching the little park he had observed from the ridge, he halted in a grove of cedars, unsaddled his horse, and staked him out upon the pasture land near by to feed.

Then he gathered some dry wood and soon had a bright fire burning.

He had no fear of Indians there, and so felt secure, for the redskins would not move abroad at night, even if they were in the valley and saw the fire.

Filling his coffee pot with water from the river, he got out his haversack of provisions and began to cook his supper.

This, when ready, he ate with the relish of one in the perfect vigor of manhood, afterward spreading his blankets among the cedars, throwing on more wood to brighten up the surroundings, that he might see about him.

In gathering more wood, Buffalo Bill strolled some distance from the fire, but where the rays of its light penetrated, and as he turned with his arms full to retrace his way to camp, he suddenly stopped short.

The wood fell from his arms, and an exclamation of amazement broke from his lips.

And no wonder, for he had suddenly come face to face with an object that was enough to unnerve any one.

There before him, not a few feet away, suspended from a large limb hung a human form.

But the brave scout was only an instant in regaining his wonted calm mien, and, stepping quickly forward, he placed his hand upon the face of the hanging man, for his feet nearly reached the ground, while from his lips fairly rung the words:

"Great God! the body is still warm!"

CHAPTER II.

THE UNKNOWN.

Buffalo Bill had often seen other men hanging in the timber, and he had known of many wild deeds of lawless bands and Vigilantes.

Yet this was a case that startled him, for it was coming upon a man hanged to a tree, in a valley said to hold no inhabitant, where only wild beasts roamed at will.

When his hand rested upon the face of the man he felt that the flesh was yet warm, that death, if he was dead, had been most recent.

He forgot his own danger, from those who had done the deed, in his anxiety about the unknown man, and quickly he drew his knife, severed the rope and bore the form to his little camp.

He then took the noose from about the neck, and

saw that it had not closely encircled it, that there was a space under the chin which had prevented quick strangulation.

The hands were tied behind the back, and the feet also were bound, but they were quickly released.

Then the scout placed his ear over the heart of the man, and felt that there was the slightest, faintest pulsation observable.

He got water from the stream and bathed the face and neck, and violently rubbed the chest and hands, while he forced a little whisky and water into the lips.

Thus he worked hard upon the man to bring him back from across the death line, back into life.

It was some time before he felt that he would be rewarded, but drawing off the boots he placed his feet close to the blazing logs, and having heated water in the coffee pot he wet towels with it, and bound them about the wrists, over the pulse, and laid them over the heart, while he continued to bathe the red and swollen neck.

At last the pendulum of life began its backward and forward swings, at first slowly, it is true, and with an irregular movement, yet showing that the struggle to live was exerting itself.

Steadily came the heart beats after a while, the pulses stopped their fluttering and became more regular, and a tinge of color came into the pallid face.

At last, after hours of work, the lips parted with gasps, as the breath filled the lungs, then came the quivering of the muscles, a trembling of the eyelids, and the next moment the gaze of the man met that of Buffalo Bill.

There was a choking sensation, as the man strove to speak, and then came the words in a low, hoarse whisper:

"My God! why did you not let me die?"

"Must I endure all this agony again?"

"My good friend, you are not now with those who made you suffer.

"I found you hanging to a tree, and as your flesh was yet warm, I worked on you for hours to bring you back to life."

"Ah! you are not one of those demons who sought my life, and——"

He paused and the scout said, gently:

"No, I am a scout from Fort Defiance, and coming into this valley to camp I found you here."

"Go! Go at once, for if you stay here you will meet your death.

"Go, I say!"

The man spoke excitedly, yet he did not move, as might have been expected.

His whole form seemed lifeless, paralyzed.

"I have brought you back to life and I shall remain and care for you until you are able to leave with me.

"If danger comes, I shall meet it as best I can," was the reply of Buffalo Bill.

"No, you must depart from here and at once, for you do not know what your fate will be if you remain.

"You have brought me back to life, yet it would have been better had you left me to die, for see, I am helpless, my whole form seems paralyzed."

"That feeling is but temporary, the blood will soon circulate freely, and you will be all right again."

"You think so?" eagerly asked the sufferer.

"I do."

"Heaven grant that your words may be true, for once again strong and myself, there is work that I can do.

"But, crippled, paralyzed as I now feel that I am, it would be far better had you allowed me to die."

"You will soon be yourself again, my friend, but who are you, may I ask?"

The man started at the question, gazed an instant fixedly into the scout's face and said in a low tone:

"You saved my life, and yet I cannot tell you who I am—I dare not.

"I am unknown to you, and so must remain until I have accomplished a duty that my life is now devoted to.

"Yes, I must remain unknown."

Buffalo Bill was impressed by the words and manner of the man, whom he had brought back to life.

He saw in the stranger one of fine physique, one whose form indicated great strength, endurance and activity.

He was clad in a suit of buckskin, even wearing moccasins, and his hat, which had fallen off, was made of fox-skin.

He had no weapons, and his clothing appeared to have been rifled as though in search of plunder, for the pockets were turned inside out.

The man's face was heavily bearded, and he wore

his hair long, falling half-way to his belt down his back.

The face, however, was a striking one, the eyes being large, expressive, and with a look in them that was strangely fascinating, though unreadable.

The teeth were even, white, and the nose straight and well formed.

It was hard to guess the age of the sufferer, for though he hardly looked to be thirty, yet there were gray hairs upon his temples, and he had the appearance of one more settled than had he lived only a score and half of years.

His expression was strangely stern, save when he spoke, and then eyes and face lighted up to a remarkable extent.

Having seen that the man was nearly helpless, the scout felt that something must be done to aid him, and he said:

"Do you know this valley?"

"I do."

"Could you suggest a place where we might find a safe retreat for several days?"

"Yes."

"Then I will aid you into my saddle and we will go there."

"I can do nothing to aid myself."

"I see you cannot.

"How far away is the spot you have in mind?"

"Three miles."

"We will start at once then."

The scout made his preparations and raised the man to his saddle, but found that he was unable even to ride there.

Mounting behind him therefore he held him in the saddle, and directed by the unknown, continued on down the valley for a mile.

Then he branched off to the right at a crossing of the streams, following in the bed of a small rivulet.

Up this he went for a mile or more, and came at last into a heavily-wooded canyon where the little stream had its source.

Dark though it was, Buffalo Bill discovered that there was grass in plenty all about, timber and water, with the canyon ending back in a lofty mountain range.

Directed still by the unknown he found a camping-place, and soon had a bright fire burning, which shed its light through the dark canyon.

"The very spot for a camp," he said, as he took

his companion from the saddle and laid him upon his blankets near the fire.

"Yes, no one will come here, and firelight cannot be seen by night, nor the smoke by day, for it all goes into the dark holes you see in that cliff.

"Then, too, there are graves here by the score and not even a white man of this valley will come here."

"There are white men in this valley, then?" quickly said the scout.

The unknown did not reply, and the scout did not press the matter, but kept up considerable thinking over what he had heard.

The horse was lariatied out to feed, wood was gathered, and the scout soon had a cheery camp of it.

He divided his blankets with his suffering comrade, and then they turned in for the couple of hours which yet remained of the night.

The sun was up when Buffalo Bill awoke.

His companion was sleeping soundly, so he did not disturb him, and after leading his horse to water, gathered a quantity of wood, getting the largest logs he could find, for he had decided what course he would pursue if the unknown was not much better when he awoke.

When at last the stranger did awake, Buffalo Bill found that he was able to use his hands and arms, but he yet seemed paralyzed from his waist down.

He gave him a hard rubbing, then breakfast, and said:

"See here, pard, I have come to a resolve about you."

"Yes."

"I have food enough to last you a few days, and what I will also need for myself, and I will build you a large fire of logs, put provisions within your reach, and start at once for Fort Defiance to bring you aid with all dispatch."

The answer fairly startied the scout, for the words came quickly:

"No, no, don't do that! Great God, no!"

CHAPTER III.

THE REFUSAL.

It was in vain that Buffalo Bill urged and argued that the only thing he could do was to go to the fort for aid, for the unknown strenuously opposed it.

He said that the scout must leave him there, if he would go, but not to bring aid, for he did not wish

any assistance from the fort, and would not consider the resolve of Buffalo Bill for a moment.

He positively grew excited in discussing it.

But Buffalo Bill felt that something must be done to save the man.

He was better, it was true, yet he needed medical aid, and must have it.

If he remained thus with him, it would be weeks before he could get away, perhaps longer, and he must return to the fort and report, for he had come away only on a short leave to make the trip alone into the Death Valley.

His provisions would not last more than a week longer, and there was nothing for him to do but to go.

The argument of the man that he should not, he could not but feel was from no dread of being left alone, but from some other cause, and he could not get any statement from him as to just what that reason was.

"Why do you not wish me to do that which reason tells me is best for both of us?" he asked, when the two were having dinner together that first day in the canyon camp.

"I would rather die than have you go.

"I am getting better, I feel it, I know it, and in a month will be myself again."

"But we have no food to last over a week—in fact, hardly so long."

"Perhaps I may be well within that time."

"No, it would be impossible, though I do believe that a surgeon could soon bring you around.

"I can go to Fort Defiance and return within four days, and I know the surgeon, or his assistant, will return with me, and I can bring an ambulance along also to carry you back."

"No, I will not go, and no army man must come into this valley.

"You know it is fatal to all who come here."

"I have heard so, but I am very much alive yet, and you seem to have lived here."

"And was hanged, but saved by you.

"No, not a soul must come here, not one.

"I will soon be well, and then we can go our separate ways."

"You are still unknown to me?"

"Yes."

"And why?"

"I must be so.

"That's all that I can tell you."

"You doubt me?"

"No, for I know you."

"Who am I?"

"Buffalo Bill."

"How do you know that?"

"Well I have seen you before."

"I do not recall having met you before."

"Perhaps not, yet we have met, or at least I have seen you before, and I know you to be Buffalo Bill, Chief of Military Scouts at Defiance."

"I know you to be one to trust, if I dared do so, with life and all else."

"But I must remain unknown to you, and, just as soon as I am able, you must leave me, going quickly away from here and never returning to this Valley of Death again."

"Such an injunction simply increases my desire to know more of the weird valley."

"Upon your life, you must not."

"Be content with what you do know, that it is a weird place, that it has its mysteries, its graves with histories, yes, you see yonder the mounds that mark the resting-place of half a hundred people whose real fate is unknown."

"Do you know what their fate was?"

"It matters not if I do, or do not, for they are dead, their story is told now only by those mounds," and he pointed up the canyon to where the eyes of the scout were resting upon a number of graves, not one of which was marked.

The scout arose and walked slowly toward the graves.

They were overgrown with grass, showing that they had not been recently made, and Buffalo Bill counted just forty-nine of them.

There was in the very center a space left vacant, as though by design, and it was large enough for another grave.

Here was driven a stake, which the scout bent over and looked at with interest, for upon it were just forty-nine notches, cut into it with a knife.

"How strange," muttered Buffalo Bill as he stood there gazing at the stake, placed in the vacant spot in the center of the graves.

"Well, my duty is plain, and that is to go to Defiance and get aid for this poor fellow, or he will die yet in this valley, where the mystery deepens to me every minute."

"Yes, I will arrange to slip quietly away to-night, leaving a note telling him I felt it my duty to go,

and placing food enough to last him within his reach.

"Yes, I go to-night, that is certain."

With this determination formed, the scout walked about the canyon, taking it all in carefully, changed his horse to another spot further away, and began his preparations to quietly steal away from his unknown comrade when night should come on.

Buffalo Bill was anxious to make his arrangements for going in a way that would not attract the attention of his strange companion to what he intended doing.

Conning the matter carefully over, he felt that it was his duty to go for aid, as it was impossible for him to move the man from the camp with him so helpless.

He could not hold himself in the saddle, even, and the scout would not be able to ride a long distance holding him there, for the double duty on his horse would soon break him down.

He gave his companion a good supper, and, while preparing it, divided his provisions, placing the largest quantity to one side for the use of the sufferer.

He managed to slip out one blanket also, and had placed his horse some distance away, so that his going would not be heard by the stranger.

By the twilight he wrote a few lines on a slip of paper and wrapped it on a stick which he intended to place where the unknown would see it upon awakening in the morning.

He made another effort to find out something about his strange companion, why he was in Death Valley, and what had brought him to that part of the country, as also who had been his foes.

But all questions proved in vain, as the unknown still insisted upon remaining a mystery to the scout.

When they had retired for the night, and the scout felt that his companion was sleeping soundly, he rolled noiselessly out from under the blankets, placed the provisions within reach of the other's hand and a revolver as well, with some ammunition, in case any wild beasts, discovering his crippled condition, might seek to attack him.

He then piled up near him a number of logs, which could be thrown upon the fire to keep it burning, and which had been liberally supplied with wood by the scout, though the weather was not cold.

Then, with a glance of farewell at the mysterious man whom he had befriended, Buffalo Bill crept

silently away out into the darkness beyond the fire-light.

He carried with him a small bag of provisions and a blanket, and soon reached his saddle and bridle which he took along with him to where his horse was staked out.

He had written upon the slip of paper as follows:

"I feel that it is my duty, Unknown Pard, to seek aid for you, and so I steal away like a thief in the night.

"By the time you awake I shall be far on my way toward the fort, and I will push on with all speed, so as to get back to you as soon as possible, with a surgeon and an ambulance.

"I leave a revolver for you, and food and water, all within reach, and there is wood sufficient to keep your fire going for some days.

"Cheer up and expect soon to see me back again with help.

Yours,

"BUFFALO BILL."

"That letter will explain that he is not deserted, but that I go for his good," muttered the scout, as he mounted his horse and rode away, riding down the stream as he had came up it, in the water.

He followed the brook down to where it flowed into the larger stream at the ford, and crossing there, turned to the left on the trail he had come with his unknown companion.

He wished to go back again by the spot where he had come upon the man hanging from a tree, for from that spot he could push rapidly on, knowing the trail the way he had come.

He rode into the little clump of timber where the hanging had occurred, with no thought of danger to himself, with no belief that a human being was nigh, and so he was startled when suddenly out of the gloom of a thicket came the low-spoken words:

"Halt!

"I wish to speak with you."

Buffalo Bill had drawn rein in an instant with one hand, while the other grasped his revolver and cocked it, so that he was quickly ready to greet friend or foe.

He was in the shadow of the timber, and yet the gloom from whence the voice had come was dense, and he could not penetrate the shadows to see who was lurking there, who had brought him to a halt.

To have turned in flight, the scout felt, might bring him a volley from his unseen challenger, while to fire at one concealed would be wrong, as it perhaps was not a foe.

The voice had been in a hoarse whisper, rather as though the speaker wished only to be heard by the one addressed.

So Buffalo Bill, having his horse well in hand for flight or fight, and his revolver ready, stood his ground and said:

"Well, I have halted.

"What have you to say?"

"You are Buffalo Bill?"

"I am."

"You are going into a trap."

"It seems as though I was in one now, as you see me while I only hear your voice."

"No, I am here to warn you of danger."

"Ah! and who are you?"

"That is not the question."

"What is?"

"To save your life, I am here."

"Indeed!

"And who are my foes?"

"Those who are foes to whoever enters the Valley of Death."

"Ah!

"And why are you my friend?"

"I will not answer that; but I am here to warn you of danger."

"What danger?"

"Death."

"Indeed, and at whose hands?"

"Never mind, but say that you will obey me."

"Suppose I do not?"

"Then you ride to your death."

"If I do?"

"Then you shall be saved from death."

"I see no other alternative than to obey."

"You are wise.

"But I shall demand a pledge of you."

"What is it?"

"You must promise not to approach nearer to me than you now are, and when I leave you, that you will not attempt to follow my trail."

"If I refuse?"

"I must leave you to your fate, for my life is at stake if I am known to befriend you."

"May you not be leading me into an ambush if I follow you?"

"Why should I, when you are at my mercy now?"

"At your mercy?"

"Yes, for I could send a bullet through your heart now, if I wished."

"Well, I'll accept your terms."

"Then follow me; but remember, do not come close to me."

"I shall not forget," answered the scout.

Then, out of the thicket glided a form upon which the eyes of the scout were riveted at once, as he tried to penetrate the darkness.

The voice had been in a hoarse whisper, and had struck Buffalo Bill as one that was boyish.

But, as the form left the timber, branching short off from the trail which Buffalo Bill had been following, he saw that the one who had warned him was a woman.

She was on foot, had short skirts, a slouch hat, and her long hair fell about her like a veil, while she glided, rather than walked along.

She led the way across the valley, after leaving the timber, and walked rapidly, ever and anon half turning to raise her hand and call out:

"Not too near, remember."

The scout checked his horse, as he seemed inclined to go nearer to his strange guide, and finding that the animal still pressed forward he dismounted and led him along.

Then he kept at the required distance, though he was most anxious indeed to get a closer look at the one who was befriending him.

He was more than ever surprised to find a woman there in that Valley of Death, a weird place which he had believed to hold no inhabitants save wild beasts, unless there was a band of redskins secretly dwelling there.

"Surely this Valley of Death is panning out most mysteriously," muttered the scout as he walked along in the footsteps of his guide.

"First I find a man hanged here, and that he will tell me nothing about himself, and next I run upon a most remarkable adventure in meeting a girl guide here.

"I do not understand it at all, but I must before I give up the trail."

After walking a distance of a mile, the guide suddenly halted in a little thicket, and a moment after Buffalo Bill saw her come out on horseback.

"I left my horse here, and now we can push along rapidly; but you must still keep your distance," she said, as she started off at a gallop, Buffalo Bill following her.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STRANGE GUIDE.

At the pace which the Girl Guide was keeping up, conversation was out of the question, and so the scout said nothing to her, but still kept his horse at the steady gallop which she had set.

Thus several miles were passed over, and ascending a ridge that was thickly wooded, Buffalo Bill beheld beyond the barren plains stretching far out for many a long mile before him.

Here the guide halted and said:

"I have saved you a dozen miles by bringing you this way, for if you will head for that black peak yonder, a volcanic mountain, you will find yourself on the trail by which you came here when the day dawns."

"How do you know the trail by which I came here?" and as Buffalo Bill spoke he started to ride nearer to the guide, when she quickly waved him back with the words:

"Be careful, for you are coming too near!"

"Pardon me; I shall not offend again."

"To answer your question, I will say that you could have reached Death Valley only by one trail, unless you know the one I just led you over, and you will return the way you came."

"Suppose I say that I prefer to remain and investigate the mysteries of this valley?"

"Brave a man as you are you would not dare do that."

"Why not?"

"You love life and your certain death would follow."

"I would take the chances to know what the mystery here is."

"Don't do it for you could not find out."

"Do you dwell here?"

"Where else could I dwell?"

"True; but I would like to know who and what you are that you can live where you say it would be certain death to me to remain?"

"I am what I am and I can say no more other than to urge you to depart at once and never come here again."

"Suppose I say I will come again?"

"Then you will find your grave here in Death's Valley, for another time I cannot save you."

"From what have you saved me now?"

"From certain death as I told you."

"Then others than you know of my being here?"

After a moment of hesitation the reply was:

"Others than I know that you came into the valley and your departure was expected very soon so that there are those who are now lying in ambush for you.

"I can tell you no more, so now go on your way."

"One question more?"

"Well?"

"How do you know who I am?"

"You do not deny that you are Buffalo Bill?"

"Oh, no."

"I know you as I have seen you before."

"When and where?"

"It matters not when or where, but I have seen you and another saw you enter the valley and hence an ambush was prepared for you when you went out, for, as I said, you would have to return the way you came in."

"An ambush to kill me?"

"Yes, for it is a law that one who ventures into this Valley of Death must die.

"But now you must go on your way and delay no longer."

Buffalo Bill hesitated, for he was undecided whether to speak of his unknown companion or not.

His strange guide had not referred to him in any way, and yet, being a woman, she would hardly be cruel toward him did she learn of his presence there, after having saved him from an ambush into which he had been riding when she brought him to a halt.

But it flashed across the mind of the scout that he would do well to say nothing of the companion he had left behind in the canyon, but to hasten on to the fort and return as soon as possible to his aid.

The more he saw and knew of the Death Valley the more anxious he was to solve the mystery hanging over it.

That there were, contrary to his former belief, dwellers there he was now assured.

But who and what were they?

They were not redskins, for Indians would not have hanged the man he had rescued did they wish to put him to death.

Who they were their victim even would not tell the scout, and herein was a riddle to solve.

They were white men beyond all doubt, but what had brought them to the Death Valley, and why did they live in that faraway spot and allow no one else to enter there, was what the scout could not under-

stand, and his strange guide would offer no explanation, which added to the complication.

In the darkness Buffalo Bill could tell nothing about his strange guide, especially as she kept him fully thirty feet distant from her.

Her voice was low and musical, and he felt sure that she was a young girl.

She had leaped into her saddle, when she mounted, with the ease of an athlete, and had led him over a trackless country unerringly, for no trail could he discover.

Now she pointed to a dark mass towering against the starlit sky, and miles away, and told him to go to it and he would strike the trail by which he had come to Death Valley.

He recognized the mountain as a volcanic peak which he had passed the morning he had come near to the Death Valley, and knew that she told him the truth.

He could also see from where he stood upon the ridge, that there was only a narrow rocky trail leading from it to the plain below, and the way they had come was unmarked, so that she doubtless had told the truth in saying, as a stranger to the valley, he could not but go out as he had come in.

"So we must part here?" he said, at last.

"Yes."

"When will I see you again?"

"Never, perhaps."

"Suppose you were to find a man lying wounded in Death Valley, alone and in distress, what would you do with him?"

"I would aid him if in my power."

"And suppose your friends were to find him?"

"My friends?"

"Yes."

"Who are they?"

"Those whom you dwell here with?"

"I have no friends."

"Are they your foes?"

"We will not discuss myself, Buffalo Bill; but I will say that were you found by me wounded and in distress here in this valley I would risk life to care for you; but I beg of you not to return here and take the chances of coming to harm.

"I have warned you, and I can say no more.

"Now good-by, for you know your way from here, and I dare not remain longer."

She waved her hand as she spoke, leaped into her

saddle and was off in a gallop, leaving the scout standing by his horse and looking after her.

"Were it not that I had to go to the fort for aid for that poor fellow, I would remain here and take her trail at dawn," muttered the scout.

"I was almost tempted to tell her of that mysterious man, whose life I had saved; but it is best perhaps that I did not.

"Well, I must get on my way now as rapidly as possible, and this cut off of twenty miles, which she said she saved me, will more than make up for the time I have lost; in fact, from her account, I would have been killed from ambush had I gone the way I came in."

The scout now slowly descended the rocky and dangerous trail to the plains below, and then mounting rode on at a canter, his guide being the volcanic peak miles ahead.

His horse was fresh and pushed on at a swift canter, and gradually the range behind him grew dim in the distance, while the volcano ahead loomed up larger and larger.

Just before dawn he reached the base of the volcano and recognized the surroundings, as he had passed there on his way to the Death Valley.

He had camped there, and seeking the same spot, where there was a pool of water in a wash, and a patch of grass, he staked out his horse, and rolling himself in his blankets lay down to catch a couple of hours of rest and sleep.

Deprived of his sleep by his care of the unknown, he felt the need of it greatly, and at once sank into a deeper slumber than it was his wont, when in danger.

But there on the barren plain he looked for no peril from Indian or white man, so felt safe, knowing that he would awake with the coming of dawn, so well had he trained himself to do so in his wild life upon the frontier.

But the scout had not dreamed that his approach to the volcanic mountain had been seen, for others were there ahead of him.

They saw him stake his horse out upon the little grass plot near the pool and then lie down to sleep.

In their hiding-place they watched him until they felt sure that he was sound asleep, and then a form crept noiselessly toward him.

Another followed, and another, until five dark forms were visible, all stealing cautiously toward the sleeping scout.

"Men, come with me for there is red work to be done."

The speaker was a heavily-bearded, long-haired man who rode into a camp in Death Valley where half a dozen men were lounging about, their horses staked out near.

The one who rode into camp showed that he had ridden hard, for his horse was covered with foam and was panting like a hound.

At the words of the one whose sudden arrival had brought them all to their feet, they started with all haste, without any parleying or questioning, to saddle their horses.

The leader, for such he appeared, took the saddle off of his own tired animal and caught one of the dozen animals staked out to ride in his stead.

The men were soon mounted and ready, four of them, while two remained in the camp, which was more than a temporary one, to judge from appearances.

The leader led the pace at a gallop, back on the trail he had come, offering no explanation to his followers, and held the gait until mile after mile was gone over.

At last they came to the summit of the ridge which surrounded the Death Valley, and here a halt was made for a rest, apparently.

But ere the men could stake out their horses the leader called to them and said:

"See here, pards, we will not halt here but go on to Volcano Peak, for there is the best place for an ambush, as night or day our horses can be kept in hiding, and there is a pool of water there as well."

"You expect some one, Cap?" asked one of the men.

"No, for some one has already entered the valley, and I wish to capture him when he comes out."

"Or kill him?"

"Yes, in the end it will come to that, but I wish first to take him alive."

"He's in the valley, Cap?"

"Yes."

"More than one?"

"No, only one."

"He's got nerve, or he has not heard of the valley."

"Oh, yes, he's got nerve, and more, he knows the stories told about the valley."

"Then he has come spying around?"

"That is just it, and you know this valley is fatal to any one who comes here."

"It is, pard, and he'll be no exception."

There was a moment of silence, as though each one of the five men was plotting his own way to get rid of the one who dared venture into the valley, or was recalling some red deed he had been guilty of in the past.

Then the leader said:

"As I told you, men, this one must be taken alive, and more, he must not be harmed."

"A friend of yours, Cap?"

"No, the bitterest foe I have on earth, and that is why I wish to capture him alive."

"I see, it will be a good thing to see him die, just for revenge, killing him as you like best."

"Just so, Nat."

"But who do you think the man is?"

All looked up with interest, but not one spoke, simply waiting to be told, as though they expected to hear the name of some one who was well known to them.

As though realizing that he had a surprise in store for his men, the leader said:

"Well, pards, the man who has dared venture into this valley, and whom we are to capture alive as he comes out, is none other than——"

The leader paused, and the men were all anxiety to have him continue, but said nothing, as they seemed to feel that he enjoyed holding them in suspense.

Then he remarked:

"The man is Buffalo Bill, chief of scouts at Fort Defiance."

The words fell like a thunderbolt among the listeners, for not one of them had expected to hear the name their leader uttered.

"Buffalo Bill?" came in a chorus as each man uttered the name.

"Yes."

"He has come into this valley?"

"Yes, Nat."

"Cap, that looks bad."

"We can capture him."

"Oh, yes, or kill him; but then he is too big a man not to be missed, and if he don't turn up, they'll send a regiment to look for him, while there is one, who, if harm falls upon him, will hunt down those who have done the deed."

"Who is that, Nat?"

"Frank Powell, the Surgeon Scout."

"Yes, they are firm pards, and the Surgeon Scout is a dangerous man."

"But Buffalo Bill has come here and he must suffer the consequences."

"I only wish that he had not come."

"So do I."

"Better let him go back unharmed."

"And guide a regiment here? Oh, no! for he has not come here without making some discovery."

"No, he has come, and he must suffer the consequences."

"Come, we will ambush him at Volcano Peak when he comes out," and the men rode on to the place of ambush.

CHAPTER V.

THE CAPTURE.

Buffalo Bill was awakened from his sound slumber by a command that could not but startle even his iron nerve, for he heard the words:

"Buffalo Bill, you are my prisoner!"

The scout's eyes opened upon a scene that was terrifying, and the first glance was sufficient to show him that the slightest resistance meant instant death, for he saw five forms standing within a few feet of him.

"Well, pards, you have got me covered," he said, without the slightest show of excitement, and sitting up he coolly glanced about him.

"Yes, so don't be a fool and throw your life away."

"Hand over your guns, Buffalo Bill!"

"If you want them, take them, for I'll not hand them to you."

"Nat, take the guns," ordered the leader, and the man addressed stepped forward and took the scout's rifle and belt of arms.

"Have you gotten everything, Nat?"

"I guess so."

"He's tricky, so search him."

This Nat did, though with evidently a dread that the search might end disastrously for him.

He, however, found no other weapons, and then, with a lariat secured the scout's hands firmly behind him.

"As I am slightly interested, may I ask whose prisoner I am?" inquired the scout.

"You may ask, but I shall not answer."

"What is your pleasure with me?"

"That you will find out in good time."

"All right, I am not impatient," was the indifferent remark of the scout.

When he was secured beyond resistance or escape, the leader sent two men after their horses, while a third went to saddle the animal of Buffalo Bill and bring him up.

In a few moments all were ready, and then the leader said:

"I shall tie you to your saddle, Buffalo Bill, for well I know what you are capable of, and more, I shall also blindfold you."

"Why, when I am so wholly at your mercy?"

"Well, I have known of your escaping death scores of times, when to get away seemed out of the question, and though I am sure you cannot escape us now, I shall be on the safe side and blindfold you, so you will not know where you are being taken."

"I have nothing to say, for you are the doctor," was Buffalo Bill's cool response, and at once a heavy silk scarf was fastened securely about his eyes.

Then he was aided to mount his horse, his feet were fastened to the stirrups, while the leader held the bridle-rein in his hand to prevent the animal dashing suddenly away.

The party now started upon their way, and the scout relapsed into silence.

But his brain was busy, and every step the horses made was counted, while mental note was made of the trail they were following.

"We are going back the way I came," mused Buffalo Bill, as they began to ascend the slope to the range overlooking the valley.

Hardly had he come to this conclusion when the leader, who rode by his side, asked:

"How was it that we found you at Volcano Peak, Buffalo Bill?"

"Because I happened to be there, I suppose."

"Yes, that is one reason; but you have been in Death Valley."

"Have I?"

"You have, and you did not come out where you went in."

"Didn't I?"

"No, and with any one else I would feel that you had a guide out the way you left the valley."

"And why not with me?"

"Well, you have a way of going pretty much where you please and might find a way where others would not.

"But tell me, did any man guide you out?"

"No, I saw no man to guide me."

"You just stumbled upon the other way out?"

"I leave my horse to do the work of guide when I am at a loss," said the scout, evasively.

The leader now rode ahead and the party ascended the range in single file, a circumstance that convinced the scout that they were going back into the valley by way of the trail he had followed in coming out.

Of course, he could see nothing, blindfolded as he was, but he could judge of the country and distance, and was confident that he passed over the range and along the very trail by which the mysterious Girl Guide had led him.

Once over the range they rode along upon a different soil from that beyond, and after several miles had been passed over, going at a canter, they came to a halt, when a voice called out:

"Ho, Talbot, that is Buffalo Bill you have prisoner there?"

"Yes, chief, he came into the valley scouting, and we bagged him on his way out at Volcano Peak," answered the leader of the scout's captors, while the man spoken to as chief said in a determined tone:

"Then he has sentenced himself to death."

The man who had met the party which had the scout a prisoner as they rode up and came to a halt, was tall, elegantly formed and dressed in a costume that was picturesque and striking, for he wore gray corduroy pants stuck in top boots, a velvet jacket of dark blue and embroidered in silver thread, a yellow sash about his waist and a broad sombrero, the latter looped up on one side with a gold star and with a chain encircling the crown instead of a cord.

His hair was long and his face was bearded, but hidden beneath a mask of red silk.

He was armed, and had the air of a man who was dangerous, if a foe.

In vain had Buffalo Bill endeavored to follow the nature of the country as they passed over it, for the ride had been a rapid one, there had been a number of turns, and several times they had dismounted.

While nothing was said to convince him of the fact, he was sure that the trail his captors were taking him by was a very dangerous one to take, and when they had halted he knew that considerable of an ascent had been made.

He hoped he would now be freed from the blindfold, for he was anxious to behold the man who had so readily recognized him, and who had been addressed as chief.

There was a certain tone in the voice which he felt he had heard before.

Calling this man chief told him that the leader of the party who had captured him was simply an under officer, though addressed as "captain" by his men.

It was a surprise, and a startling one, to Buffalo Bill, to discover that the dread Valley of Death had dwellers in it, who were indeed to be feared.

Who were they, and why were they there?

Who was the man that had been hanged, and whom he had left in the little canyon?

Then, too, who was his Girl Guide?

These questions the scout could not answer.

Not a word had he overheard to tell him who the men were, or where they were taking him.

He could only wait and hope, but he did not like the chief's words that in venturing into Death Valley he had sealed his doom.

The day had dawned ere the party reached their halting-place, and the sun was streaming down into the valley, but all was darkness to the blindfolded scout.

He was freed from the bonds about his feet and ordered to dismount.

This he did, and he was led away a hundred yards or more, his hands still bound behind him, his eyes still blinded.

It seemed to him when he halted that he was in a cavern, for the air was chill and damp, yet he could not tell.

He heard the rattling of chains, and then his arms were freed, while instantly about his wrists were clasped manacles, and he was once more secured beyond resistance or escape.

"Will you not take this bandage from my eyes?" he asked.

"Yes, there is no harm in doing so now," was the reply of the man known as Nat.

He removed the scarf, and a thrill of horror ran through the scout as he felt that he could not see.

"Great God! am I blind?" he said, eagerly.

The man by his side laughed and replied:

"You might as well be, in here, for no light comes into this place."

"Ah! I am in a cave?"

"Yes, but you will find the grave darker and colder."

"It is your intention to put me to death, then?"

"Yes, the chief and our captain are arguing the matter now."

"What is their charge against me?"

"Curiosity."

"How do you mean?"

"You were too curious about the Death Valley."

"It seems I had reason to be curious."

"Well, your curiosity will cost you your life, that is all."

"Maybe."

"There is no doubt, but a certainty."

"When am I to start on the long trail?"

"Well, that I don't know, but I guess very soon. Here comes some one now."

Footsteps were heard approaching, and then a voice called out:

"Ho, Nat!"

"Here."

"The prisoner is there?"

"Yes, all secure."

"Buffalo Bill, I am here to tell you, from the chief, that you are to die at sunrise to-morrow, for it has been so decided.

"I tell you, that you may spend your time in prayer."

"Do you mean to murder me?"

"Yes, you are doomed."

"Why?"

"Because you came into the Valley of Death, for any one who ventures here must die.

"Come, Nat, leave the prisoner with his own thoughts," and the two men walked away, leaving Buffalo Bill in irons and alone in the midnight gloom of the cavern.

That Buffalo Bill felt his situation in all its keen hopelessness, the reader can well understand.

He was heavily ironed, and feeling, he found that the iron chains were fast about huge rocks, and the manacles upon his wrists were heavy and too strong to break, even had he the means at hand for breaking them.

He tried to slip his hands through, but they were just too small for that.

For the space of a few feet he could move about, and he felt rocks above and on either side of him, for there was not a ray of light that penetrated the darkness of the cavern.

Beneath his feet was a bear robe, and upon it was a blanket and pillow of grass with a canteen of water also.

Such were the comforts the place afforded.

He sat down upon the bear robe and felt about him.

His hand touched something that caused him to start; but only for an instant, for he had an iron nerve.

Then he grasped the object and drew it toward him.

"It is a body," he said, in a low tone, and his hand swept over the face and head.

The flesh was icy cold to the touch, and the scout thrust the form from him, while he muttered grimly:

"I am not alone in this death hole at least.

"Some poor victim, I suppose, and his death leads me to feel that it was no idle threat made that I should die.

"Who is there?"

He felt that some one was near him and he was right, for the answer came:

"Don't get skeert, pard, for we has come ter move a body as might not be pleasant comp'ny fer yer.

"He died last night here, and you is in the irons he had on."

"Poor fellow, he has all of my sympathy."

"Better keep it for yerself, pard; have yer found ther deader?"

"Yes, he lies here by my side."

"Well, you is a game one; but I guess you'll be glad for us to take him away."

"No, for he was company for me."

"Waal, you is game and no mistake.

"Come, Jack, let's git the stiff out o' ther way, for I doesn't like this old rock tomb myself."

Buffalo Bill heard the men come nearer and felt them drag the body away from its resting-place by his side.

Then he said:

"Who was he?"

"He were a man as come into Death Valley."

"And he was killed for that reason?"

"Yas, he were put here to die, an' you see he did it."

"I feel that he did, for I can see nothing in this black hole."

"You is to go the same way."

"To be killed?"

"Yes."

"Do you kill every man who comes into Death Valley?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"It's a way the chief has of getting rid of them as is too curious."

"Have many lost their lives through curiosity?" quietly asked Buffalo Bill.

"Waal, I guess so."

"How many?"

"You'll make thirteen that I knows of."

"Yas, you was an unlucky number, pard," the other man said.

"It seems that the twelve before me, from your accounts, were also unlucky numbers."

"That's so."

"Why did you not bring a lantern with you?"

"It's unhealthy."

"What do you mean?"

"Waal, it's ag'in orders of the chief, and I don't want ter see what's in here."

"What is here?"

"Waal, all them as is put to death is buried here, and we is ter dig a grave now for this one."

"I guesses yer'll see a dozen ghosts to-night."

"I am not afraid of ghosts."

"Nor anything else I has heerd of, from all accounts, about yer, Buffalo Bill."

"Well, I should like to see about me, and know just what kind of a place I am in."

"You'll feel better for not seeing," was the answer as the two men moved away in the darkness, bearing their ghastly burden with them.

They had been gone but a few minutes when Buffalo Bill heard the sound of dull blows, and he recognized them as the strokes of a pick-ax, and knew that they were burying the unfortunate man who had died there in the cavern.

The sound was kept up for some time, and then a deathlike silence followed.

Having lost much sleep of late, and feeling tired, with nothing to do, and unable to think of any plan for escape, the scout schooled his nerves to quietness and lay down upon the robe to get what rest he could.

It was only a few minutes before he was fast asleep, and he slept for a long while and then was awakened by a touch upon his arm.

He quickly grasped a hand and held it with firm grip, while a low voice said:

"I am not here to harm you, but to help you."

"Ah! I know that voice," said Buffalo Bill in response

to the cautiously uttered words of the one whose hand he had grasped.

"Who am I?"

"One who proved a mascot to me, when I was in danger before."

"Yes, and who did not know that the ambush was at Volcano Peak, instead of on the range."

"That was not your fault."

"Yet I failed to aid your escape, and I am here now to befriend you."

"That is pleasant news for me."

"I will save you, if you are willing to agree to certain terms."

"What are they?"

"I cannot tell you other than that you must take a solemn oath not to return to this valley, or betray what you know of it now."

"If I refuse?"

"If you refuse, Buffalo Bill, you will die as surely as the sun rises to-morrow morning," was the impressive response.

"Then, to save my life, I must vow to keep silence and so allow a band of cutthroats to still dwell in this valley unmolested?"

"Yes."

"Why will you not aid me to escape without my taking such a cowardly oath?"

"Because I cannot."

"Why?"

"I come to you from another."

"Who?"

"I cannot make that known to you."

"Man or woman?"

"I will not tell."

"That one demands the oath of me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Well, to allow you to escape that one has to commit a wrong, and to allow you to be put to death would also be a sin."

"I cannot aid you unknown to that one, and so I ask you to take the oath that you may not be put to death."

"They will hardly dare to put me out of the way, desperate as they seem."

"Do not treasure that hope, Buffalo Bill, for you do not know the incentive they have to take your life."

"Yes, you will surely die."

"Well, I suppose I can do nothing else than take the oath."

"You are wise."

"It looks cowardly though to do so."

"Oh, no, for you would only throw your life away not to do so, and if you escape you will simply have to

keep silent about Death Valley, and what you know of it."

"And allow the red deeds done here to go on!"

"They had better go on than you die and do no good, for after your death they will be continued just the same."

"You are right there, I believe."

"Then be wise and make me a promise that you will do as I ask."

"If I do I am to be allowed to escape?"

"If you do you shall go free from this Death Dungeon to-night."

"What is the oath you wish me to take?"

"Another will ask it of you, not I."

"When?"

"Very soon, but do not be surprised at anything that may occur or you may hear, and when asked for your oath do not answer quickly."

"I can say no more."

Without a sound, the speaker glided away from the side of the scout, who muttered to himself:

"Well, if I escape out of this that woman will indeed be my mascot."

"It does look cowardly in me to take an oath not to hunt down these villains, and yet life is dear to me, and perhaps some one else may ferret them out."

"I only wish Frank Powell had taken this trail with me, for then he would have been the man to hunt them down."

"I don't suppose my oath will prevent my giving the Surgeon Scout a hint that there is game to hunt in Death Valley."

"Well, it's my oath not to betray the fiends, or my life, and take it I am sure now that they will."

"Yes, I have seen enough, since I came into this Valley of Death to show that those who rule here are merciless, for the unknown whom they hanged, the unfortunate victim who died here, are witnesses of their cruelty."

"Ah! I hear some one coming, and it cannot be my mascot, for I could not hear her step."

The scout listened, and there came to his ears the sound of a step.

The footfalls were slow and measured, as though the one coming was feeling his way in the darkness, and there was also heard the sound of a stick striking the rocks to guide the walker forward.

Nearer and nearer came the footsteps, and then, in a low, deep voice came the words:

"Speak, that I may know where you are in the blackness."

"I am here within a few feet of you," answered the scout.

"Good! I feared to fall into the Bottomless Pits, which are near."

"You are Buffalo Bill?"

"I am."

"I have come to accept your terms of escape, your oath, for I will trust you," and the man now stood near to the scout, who still remained seated upon the robe.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OATH.

"I know you, Buffalo Bill," said the one who had come into the Death Dungeon, as he stood by the scout.

"You certainly have the advantage of me," was the reply.

"Yes, and will keep it, for in this Egyptian darkness you do not know me."

"That meant that in the sunlight I would?"

"Yes."

"Well, whoever you are, what is your motive in sparing my life where others have been shown no mercy?"

"How do you know this?"

"A dead man lay here a few minutes ago."

"Ah, yes."

"And I believe there are a dozen graves in the entrance to this black hole."

"Were you not blindfolded as you came in?" quickly asked the man.

"Oh, yes, but I know that the graves are there, and I ask why do you show me mercy when you have been merciless to others?"

"I have reasons for it which you cannot know."

"Are you the man whom I heard addressed as chief?"

"Suppose that I am?"

"You are not."

"Why do you think so?"

"If you were chief you would make no secret of setting me free."

"A good argument, truly."

"No, I am not chief."

"And we have met before?"

"I did not say so."

"You said that you knew me."

"Who does not?"

"You implied that you were personally known to me."

"We will not discuss that."

"What is it your pleasure to discuss?"

"Your escape."

"That pleases me."

"To remain here is your doom."

"I have been told so."

"You do not care to die like a rat in a hole, so I sent

one to ask you to take an oath not to speak of your coming to Death Valley, or to betray what you have seen here——”

“Seen?”

“I should have to possess the eyes of an owl to see anything here.”

“You saw before you were captured.”

“What did I see?”

“You discovered that the valley was inhabited.”

“Yes, I am not blind, or was not then.”

“What I am now I cannot tell until I get a glimpse of the sunlight without.”

“Well, you are to take oath never to return here again, nor to betray your having been here, or any discoveries you have made.”

“If I refuse I am to die?”

“You are.”

“If I accept you will aid me to escape?”

“Through another, yes.”

“Who is that?”

“One who begged for your life, she whom you told just now you would give your solemn oath not to betray us.”

“Will you take my oath?”

“Yes.”

“An oath under compulsion is not binding in law.”

“It may not be in law, but it is with a man such as you are.”

“Thank you.”

“I know, if you give your solemn pledge not to betray us, you will keep it.”

“And you demand this?”

“I do.”

“When?”

“Now, for I have brought a Bible with me, and you are to place your hands, manacled as they are, upon it, and repeat after me the words of the oath which I demand of you.”

“In return for which I am to go free?”

“Yes.”

“All right, I can see my way to do nothing else, and I certainly must admit that you have me at your mercy.”

“I certainly have.”

“Now kneel.”

The scout did so.

“Hold out your hands until you feel this open Bible that I hold, and place them upon it.”

Buffalo Bill was about to obey when he felt some one step to his side.

Not a sound was made, but his hands were grasped and held up, while the chains were shaken purposely.

He felt that other hands than his had rested upon the open Bible when the holder of it said:

“There, that is right.”

“Now to the oath.”

“Yes, the oath.”

Buffalo Bill started, for he had not uttered the words, which came in a deep voice from lips within two feet of him.

“Repeat after me.”

“I will,” and it was again the voice near him that uttered the words.

“I do solemnly vow——”

“I do solemnly vow——” came in the hoarse voice of the unknown.

“Not to betray my coming to this valley——”

“Not to betray my coming to this valley——” were the words repeated as before.

“Or to make known aught that I have discovered here.”

These words were also repeated as before.

“I solemnly vow not to return here again, so help me High Heaven!”

These words followed as had the others.

“Amen!”

“Amen!” came the response.

“Good! you have saved your life, Buffalo Bill, for I will send one here to guide you to freedom; but God help you, if you break your oath.”

“So be it,” said Buffalo Bill, for the mysterious utterer of the oath a moment before had already glided away from his side.

Buffalo Bill spoke again to the one who had demanded the oath of him, but he made no reply and the scout heard him shuffling away in the darkness.

He was more than amazed at what had happened, for he had not been the one to take the oath upon which his life depended.

That the one who had administered it thought that the scout had uttered the words, there was no doubt whatever.

He had no thought that any other than the scout and himself were present in the dungeon.

Buffalo Bill had not suspected the presence near of any other until he felt the touch of a hand upon his arm.

Who that other was he could but guess.

He had felt that the hands that thrust his own back from the Bible were small, and when the voice repeated the oath it was disguised, and but for the fact that no one was thought to be there it might have betrayed the fact that it was a woman's tones disguised.

That he had not made the vow, though supposed to have done so, was a source of great relief to the scout.

That the one who had made the vow wished to pre-

vent his uttering it, implied that she wished him free to do as he pleased.

This would mean that she wanted the band to be tracked down, wished him to return to the Death Valley and unearth the dark mystery hanging over it.

The scout lay back upon the robe with a feeling of almost contentment.

He felt that in his mascot, be she who she might, he had a firm friend in camp, and he was willing to leave his life in her hands.

Of course, the added mysteries of the Death Valley impressed him more and more.

In the weird retreat there was certainly a band of lawless men, held there for some purpose beyond the understanding of the scout.

Among these men was a woman, and she had proven his friend.

Then there was another friendly to him—the one who had demanded the oath of him, under promise of setting him free if he took it.

At the head of this outlaw band was a chief, who took the lives of men at will whom he feared or wished out of his way.

These things the scout pondered over deeply while awaiting for the next act in the strange drama in which he was an actor.

It seemed that he waited a long time, but then, with the extreme darkness about him, he had no way to judge the time.

He was hungry and most uncomfortable, bound as he was, and in total darkness, yet he would bear anything to make his escape.

At last he felt that some one was near him.

He had heard no sound, but instinct told him that he was not alone.

That he was right in his surmise was proven a moment after, when a low voice said:

"I have come for you."

"You are indeed my friend."

"No, I am simply doing what I deem my duty toward you, Buffalo Bill."

"We will not quarrel about the motive, I assure you, that prompts you to be so kind."

"I am going to set you free."

"Thank you."

"But you must do as I tell you."

"What would you have me do?"

"I am going to trust you."

"You are very kind."

"I am going to let your hands be free, but you must be blindfolded until I see fit to let you remove the bandage from your eyes."

"So be it."

"You must not, under any circumstances, raise your hands to remove this bandage until I give you permission."

"I will obey you."

"Now let me unlock those irons."

She felt for the iron manacles, and soon had unlocked them.

Then she took a scarf from about her neck, and with it securely bandaged the scout's eyes, so that he could not have seen a ray of light when gazing at the sun.

"Now, give me your hand."

The scout did so, and she led him along through the cavern, following its windings with a slow but sure tread.

At last they came out into the open air.

It was a starlight night, and the Girl Guide still led the scout along, holding him by the hand, and following a trail that was dangerous for even a pedestrian to travel.

She at last reached a valley, and then spoke for the first time:

"Your horse is here, and your belt of arms hang upon the saddlehorn."

"You must still remain blindfolded, however, for I will lead your horse as I have you."

"I will do as you tell me," was the reply.

The scout was now led up to his horse, which was saddled and bridled, and his belt of arms and rifle did indeed hang upon the saddlehorn.

At the request of the guide, he mounted, while she, taking the rein of the horse, led the way on down the valley, walking at a brisk pace.

Buffalo Bill rode along in silence for a couple of miles, or more, his horse led by the girl.

He knew that it was night by the feeling of the atmosphere, and something told him that he had traveled over a perilous trail.

But, though his arms were free he did not once raise his hands to remove the bandage from his eyes, great as was the temptation to do so.

He had given his promise to his rescuer and he would not break it.

So on he went, the guide leading his horse, until at last she came to a halt and said:

"We part here, for you can find your way alone now."

"Not blindfolded?"

"Oh, no."

"Dismount and I will take the bandage off your eyes."

He obeyed and a moment after he could see.

But the long time he had been in total darkness, and

the blindfolding, caused his eyes to feel strangely at first and blink even when turned upon the stars.

"I had half feared that I was blind, and I am glad to see that I am all right," he said.

"You will be all right soon.

"Now do you know yonder rock?"

"Yes, if I mistake not, you led me by it on my way out before."

"Yes, and after passing it give your horse his head, for he has been over the trail with you and will follow it.

"But leave Volcano Peak far to your right, as you may find foes there."

"I will do so, for I am in no humor for a fight yet."

"No, and your escape must not be known until to-morrow night, when you are to be sent for to be executed."

"Ah! I see.

"I had forgotten that I was to be killed to-morrow."

"As surely as you had remained a prisoner you would have been."

"I do not doubt it, and I feel that I owe you my life."

"I am glad that you do," was the low response.

"And let me tell you that I shall hope to some day be able to prove my appreciation of it."

"Never mind about that now."

"Tell me one thing."

"Well?"

"Will not your release of me get you into trouble?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I will not be known as your rescuer."

"But some one will be?"

"Perhaps, though I have tried to cover up the tracks of rescue so as to have it appear that you slipped your hands through the irons, found your way out of the cave and to your horse, for your saddle and weapons were near the corral."

"Should it be discovered that some one did aid my escape?"

"Then some one will be shot, that is all."

"Little loss if it be one of the band."

"Perhaps yes.

"But now I have a favor to ask of you."

"Well?"

"Will you grant it?"

"How can I refuse?"

"You did not take an oath not to return here?"

"No, some one took it for me."

"Of course I did; but I did so for a purpose."

"And that purpose?"

"That you might not be prevented from coming here and ferreting out the mystery of Death Valley."

"I shall do so, for I am not bound by the oath."

"But the promise?"

"Well."

"Is that you will not come for six months."

The scout was silent, for he wished to oblige his rescuer, but yet recalled the man lying helpless up the canyon, and for whom he was to return.

"I do not see how I can promise that," he at last said.

"Why not?"

"Well, I have my reasons, and I cannot tell you what they are."

He was in a quandary, for kind as the girl had been to him she might not be friend of the man he had found hanged.

He dared not tell her that he had one in hiding, for he could not guess the result.

She might know of his hanging, and might not.

The strange conduct of the man in making nothing known to him, caused him to fear that the discovery that he was not dead would at once be the means of putting him to death at the hands of the band who had before sought his life.

The girl might be trusted, and might not.

At last he said, having decided what he would do:

"Yes, I'll make the promise not to return for six months, once I have left the valley."

"Thank you—good-night," and without another word she glided away back on the trail they had come.

CHAPTER VII.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

Buffalo Bill called after the retreating girl, but she waved her hand only, making no reply.

He would not follow her, knowing that it was her wish that he should not.

Yet he wanted to know more that she alone could tell him.

Turning to his horse, when she had disappeared, he found a haversack full of provisions strapped to the saddle, and a couple of blankets also.

His guide had certainly remembered his wants.

For some minutes after she had disappeared Buffalo Bill stood in deep thought.

At last he said to himself:

"Well, I could not but make her the promise, after all she did for me, and six months is not very long to wait, with other duties devolving upon me, especially as in that time I can organize a band of men to come here with me and search out every mystery in this valley.

"I am certain of one thing, however, and that is that no one else will dare come here in the meantime, so the secret will keep for me to discover.

"As I have given my promise, the only thing I can do now is to take that unknown pard of mine away with me to-night.

"It is not yet midnight, and the canyon is only half a mile from here, so I will go after him.

"He can ride and I walk, for I must strap him on in some way, and we'll get to a hiding-place by dawn, and remain all day, when we can push on by night again.

"It will be slow and tedious work to take him with me, but I can do nothing else that I can see, for my pledge bars me from coming back for him.

"I did not dare tell her that he was there, good as she seemed, for what he is to her I could not guess."

Having made up his mind to the course he would pursue, the scout mounted and rode on the trail to the stream, and at the crossing turned up the little brook toward the canyon.

He soon came in sight of the canyon and cautiously approached, after staking out his horse.

As he neared the end he saw the glimmer of the fire-light and was not long in reaching it.

But an exclamation of surprise burst from his lips as he saw that the unknown was gone?

Was he deceiving him in claiming to be unable to walk?

Had he deceived him merely to have the scout leave him?

Buffalo Bill stood for some time trying to answer the questions he asked himself.

He at last gave it up as useless and began to search about the fire for traces of the missing man.

He threw more wood on the fire and made a bright blaze.

Then he saw that it had been many hours since the fire had been replenished with wood.

This meant that the unknown had been gone for some time.

The blankets had been rolled up, the provisions taken, and certain it was that the man had been either able to depart unaided, or he had been assisted.

If the former, then he surely had deceived Buffalo Bill in pretending to be helpless.

If the latter, then he had been found by his foes, and that would mean his death.

Buffalo Bill's search revealed nothing more than that the unknown was gone.

At last, after thinking the matter over from every standpoint, Buffalo Bill decided what he would do.

"As I have not yet left the valley my promise can still hold good, I guess.

"At any rate, the mysterious going from here of a man I deemed utterly helpless, alters my plans, for I shall remain to-night and to-morrow.

"Up the canyon, beyond the graves I saw there, is good water, and grass is plenty, and I'll make my camp there.

"I can stand at bay in the head of that canyon against a score of men, so sheltered would I be among the rocks, and I can retreat, if I have to, by climbing the cliffs, if I have to leave my horse, and I am just as good on my feet as any man who might follow me.

"Yes, as I have been supplied generously with provisions by my mascot, I'll remain here several days and see what further discoveries I can make."

With this the scout went after his horse and led him to the head of the canyon, where he staked him out on a plot of luscious grass.

He unsaddled him then, and selecting a camping-place, built a fire among the rocks. Going to the other fire an eighth of a mile down the canyon, he pulled the logs away, leaving them to go out.

Then he went back to his camp and cooked supper, of which he stood greatly in need, not having had anything to eat for thirty-six hours.

With his hunger satiated he wrapped himself in his blankets and was soon fast asleep.

The sun peering over the mountains aroused him and he was quickly astir.

Having changed his horse's grazing ground and led him to water, he prepared his breakfast, and was then ready for his day's work, for he intended to spend the daylight in seeing what discoveries he could make.

Buffalo Bill first climbed to the top of the cliff, and sheltered by a clump of bushes, took a survey of the valley.

There it lay before him, stretching away for many miles in the sunlight, green, beautiful in scenery, inviting, with its streams, timber mottes, hills, small vales and canyons, all peaceful as though not bearing the name of being fatal to all who entered it.

A small band of elk was feeding a mile away, and half a dozen coyotes were loping along the trail toward the little river.

An eagle was soaring aloft, and not a human being was visible far or wide.

The scout had his field-glass with him, and closely searched every knoll, motte and meadow, only to see wild animals roaming about as though in no dread of their mortal enemy, man.

Then he descended to the canyon, saw that his horse was well staked where grass was plenty, put a log on his fire, and moved down toward the former camp.

He saw where the blankets had been, and his eyes fell upon a slip of paper fastened to a stick.

It was the one he had left for the unknown, but now there was other writing upon it with a pencil.

The scout read it aloud as follows:

"Make no search for me, for it will be fatal to you and yours.

"Leave this valley at once, and await until time solves mysteries here.

"Do not come here again unless you are called upon
THE UNKNOWN."

Buffalo Bill read and re-read these lines.

They were in a bold hand, and though not addressed to him he knew that he was the one for whom the advice was intended.

He could not decipher from what he had read whether the man had gone of his own accord or been taken away.

He looked about for trails, but found none, save those made by himself in moving about.

He walked on down the canyon, but could find no tracks of hoofs save those made by his own horse, and these were faint.

From the canyon he followed the stream down toward the little river.

He had his rifle with him, and two revolvers, for, he having given one of his pistols to the Unknown, he had taken the one carried in his saddle holster to place in his belt.

If he saw any one he could hide, being on foot, and he searched well ahead and in every direction before he made a move.

Reaching the ford, he halted there.

Closely he examined the tracks, and he saw that since he had passed across the river, wild animals had gone there to drink, thus obliterating his own and all other trails.

For over an hour Buffalo Bill remained in hiding at the ford, hoping some one of the lawless band would come along.

Had one done so, the scout would then and there have tried conclusions with him.

He was just about to leave his hiding-place at the ford, when suddenly he saw a herd of antelope, feeding half a mile away in the valley, go flying away as from sight of some danger.

Instantly the scout was on the *qui vive*, and the glance of his eyes soon revealed a horseman ride into sight.

He was coming leisurely along directly upon the trail leading to the ford.

"He is my game," muttered Buffalo Bill, and he got his weapons ready for use.

He was lying amid a group of rocks overgrown with bushes, and not two hundred feet from the ford.

On came the horseman, and Buffalo Bill had made up his mind to bring him to bay by a demand to surrender.

As he drew nearer the scout saw that he was a tall man, gorgeously dressed and wearing a mask.

But, just as he was preparing to challenge him, he fortunately glanced behind him, and following his look, Buffalo Bill saw half a dozen horsemen coming up the valley toward him.

This sight was a great disappointment to Buffalo Bill, for he knew that he dared not risk a fight with seven desperate men, no matter how well fortified he might be, and having the advantage of an ambush.

They came on at a gallop after the one in advance, who did not seem to be disturbed in the least by their coming, which showed that they were his friends, not foes.

The leader halted in the stream to water his horse, and soon after the others came up.

"Did you find any trace of him?" asked the first horseman, quickly.

"No, sir, he has not yet left the valley," was the answer.

"Then let every canyon and thicket in it be searched, for his escape may mean death to us all."

"Yes, chief," was the answer, and what followed the scout did not distinctly hear, but he felt that he was the object of their conversation, and he knew his danger full well.

If they attempted to carry out their order to search every thicket, they would doubtless begin with the one in which he was hiding, and that would mean a battle to the death, for he would not surrender to any odds, knowing that he would be put to death did he do so, trusting to those men for mercy.

Buffalo Bill's face was stern and determined, as he crouched there among the rocks, his rifle ready and his revolvers loosened in his belt.

He saw the men halting at the ford, heard their conversation, and knew that he was the one they were hunting.

At last the chief said distinctly:

"Are you sure that each of the five passes are guarded?"

"Yes, chief."

"He had not passed any of them?"

"No, chief, there was no sign of a trail."

"Might he not have left his horse and gone on foot?"

"He would hardly do that with a desert to cross and no provisions with him."

"True, then he is still in this valley."

"Yes, chief, somewhere."

"Then find him, and divide here in three parties of two each, for I will continue on to the retreat."

The scout gave a sigh of relief at this, for if he had but two men to deal with and be in ambush, he could readily render a good account of himself.

The chief held some further conversation with his men and then rode on alone over the trail, which Buffalo

Bill knew must take him up to his retreat in the valley, wherever that was, for having been blindfolded in going there he could not be sure where it was.

The chief riding on, the men also separated, going in three different directions by twos.

To the regret of the scout, two of the men went on up the little brook, toward his camp.

That meant that they were going to the canyon and would find his horse.

The scout at once decided to follow them, as soon as they were out of sight, and try conclusions then and there with them, for it would not do for him to lose his horse and camp outfit.

If he did, this would almost compel a surrender on his part, for hunger would drive him to it, and on foot, without food, he could never cross the barren plains and reach the fort.

But two of the men remained so long at the ford that the others got out of sight and would reach the canyon, and he knew that it would be madness for him to meet them on the open plain, when a shot would bring the others to their aid.

At last the two at the ford moved away, going toward the other side of the range, and the third party had been told by the chief to make the rounds of the passes and order the men there to keep a bright lookout for the escaped prisoner.

There was nothing for the scout then to do but endeavor to reach the upper part of the valley where the nature of the ground he could see would afford him a more secure hiding-place.

"I am in for it, that is certain, and about my only chance will be to go into hiding and try and recapture my horse as they come along with him.

"If they do not come this way, then I can only lay for some fellow who has a good horse and take him.

"I'll follow the trail of the chief now, and see where it will lead me, for I might as well fight it out in one place as another."

So saying, the scout left his hiding-place and started on up the valley, following the tracks of the chief's horse.

He walked rapidly, being anxious to get out of sight, as the valley was open for a couple of miles.

At last he reached undulating ground, and where there was timber scattered here and there.

The trail led on, however, toward the hills, and Buffalo Bill was glad to see that his advantages for hiding, or standing at bay, were growing better and better as he went along.

At last, as he turned a point of rocks, he came to a sudden halt, for a horse and rider were before him.

He gave a sigh of relief as he saw that it was his mascot.

She had evidently seen him some distance off, for she said, quietly:

"I was waiting for you."

"Waiting for me?"

"Yes, for I saw you when you came out of the timber yonder."

"Well?"

"I was going in search for you."

"Then you knew that I had not left the valley?"

"Yes."

"I did not break my promise, for I had not left."

"True, but why did you not leave?"

"I sought a hiding-place in the canyon for the time being, intending to leave later on."

"Why do so?"

"I will tell you frankly that I had a companion awaiting me."

She started at this and said quickly:

"You had a companion in this valley?"

"I did."

"Where?"

"Up in the canyon a couple of miles to the right of the ford."

"Where is he now?"

"I do not know."

"You left him there when I led you out of the valley?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because he was hurt, and could not go with me.

"I intended to return for him."

"And where is he now?"

"Gone."

"Where?"

"I do not know.

"I went to get him and carry him away at all hazards, but found him gone.

"I remained in the canyon all night, and began a search for him this morning.

"I had reached the ford when I met the chief and six men, and I went into hiding."

"Buffalo Bill, are you telling me the truth?" asked the girl, in an impressive manner.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SCOUT EXPLAINS.

Buffalo Bill met the eyes of the girl squarely now, at her question, and answered:

"I am telling you the truth.

"I went to the canyon for my friend, and I found him gone.

"Not having left the valley, I determined to make a search of it, so came down to the ford, when I saw that masked man and six others.

"He sent them off to search for me, telling two to go the rounds of the passes and have a close watch kept.

"Two went up the canyon, so have, of course, found my horse and outfit.

"I came on here, and that is all that I have to tell you."

"You are a bold man, Buffalo Bill, to remain in this valley after what has happened.

"Few men would have gone in search of a comrade under the circumstances."

"It would have been cowardly to have deserted him."

"Why did you not tell me that he was there?"

"I did not know how you would consider it, or if you would have protected him as you had me."

"There would not have been the secret motive, perhaps, but I would not have wished your friend to be sacrificed."

"I now wish that I had told you."

"You are sure that he is not in the canyon?"

"Yes."

"Might he not have found a better hiding-place?"

"No."

"Was his horse gone?"

"He had no horse."

The girl looked at Buffalo Bill curiously, and he at her.

He saw her now in the glare of day, and beheld a young and really beautiful girl, for she was certainly not over twenty.

Her form was slender, yet well formed, willowy, and showed strength and endurance.

She was clad in a riding habit of buckskin, embroidered and beaded, and wore a sombrero that sat jauntily upon her head.

She had a face to attract attention anywhere, and especially when such a fine face was seen out in Death Valley, and the scout gazed upon it with interest and admiration commingled.

He saw that she possessed courage stamped upon every feature, and it was a countenance to trust thoroughly.

What such a woman could be doing there, was what puzzled Buffalo Bill even more than the other mysteries of Death Valley.

"Well, Buffalo Bill, I am sorry you have lost your friend, and I shall make it my business to find out what has become of him.

"But now to save you is the first thing to do, for never in your life were you in greater danger than you are now."

"I appreciate that I am in very close quarters; but I never say die as long as I see a chance of getting out of a scrape."

"Do you see your way out now?" asked the girl, with a faint smile.

"Well, no, but I am looking for a way out."

"There is but one way for you to extricate yourself."

"And that way is——"

"To trust to me."

"I certainly cannot go far wrong in doing that, after my past experience of your skill, courage and kindness."

"It is fortunate now for you that you left your horse behind you, for now you have no trail, and I can save you.

"Do you see that cliff yonder?"

"I do."

"Go there and hide among the rocks, climbing up some thirty feet.

"There remain in hiding until I come here to-night for you, and I will bring you a horse, provisions and blankets, and will guide you once more out of danger, after which I shall expect you to keep your promise."

"I will do so."

"Now go to your hiding-place," and without another word the strange girl rode on her way in the direction from whence the scout had come.

Buffalo Bill found the cliff easy to climb, and he was not long in discovering a place among the rocks where he could hide securely, and where there was some sage brush growing, through which he could peer at the trail and be securely concealed himself.

He settled himself comfortably there and waited, taking the opportunity to eat his dinner, which he had brought with him.

He had been in hiding about an hour when he heard the sound of hoofs, and soon there came into sight around the point of rocks the two men who had gone to the canyon in search of him.

They were not alone, however, for the mysterious Girl Guide was with them, and one of the men was leading his own splendid horse which they had found there.

"Right now would I take all chances and drop those two fellows, thus securing my horse again, if it were not that my mascot is with them.

"No, I must not go back upon her," muttered the scout, while, as though dreading that he might be tempted to fire upon them, the girl, after coming around the rocks, rode quickly to the side of the men which would shield them from a bullet in that direction.

The scout was therefore forced to see his horse go by, in the charge of two men whom he knew to be outlaws,

and his outfit as well, leaving him dismounted, without food or bedding, and with only his weapons.

If the strange girl returned, as she had promised, all would be well; but if prevented from doing so from any cause beyond her control, or if she dared not risk doing so, the position of the scout was one of direst danger.

This he realized, and hence the great temptation to drop the two men from their saddles, recapture his horse and make his escape while he could.

But he resisted the temptation, and the men were allowed to pass on unmolested.

They disappeared from sight, the girl accompanying them, and the scout was left to his own reflections, by no means of the most cheerful kind.

He, however, was one to accept a situation with good grace, be it what it might, so he at once settled down to watch and wait in patience.

An hour or more passed and again he heard the approach of hoofs.

He listened attentively, and his well-trained ear told him that there was but one horse coming.

At once he decided upon his course of action.

His mascot might return, and she might not.

He would be upon the safe side and act for himself.

Quickly he climbed down the cliff and ran to a huge boulder, around which the trail wound.

He had just got into position when a horseman came into sight.

It was Talbot, the man who had captured him, and whom the men had called "captain."

"Ah!" said Buffalo Bill, and a grim smile came over his face.

Talbot was well mounted and armed, and, as he turned the point of rocks, he drew his horse down from a gallop to a walk.

The scout was perfectly cool and waited with the patience of an Indian.

There was not the slightest tremor of excitement about him, and his face wore the fearless look natural to it, and which no danger or suffering could daunt.

Nearer and nearer came the outlaw, riding leisurely along without the slightest dread of danger.

As though tired of riding, when he neared the rock he threw one leg over his saddle-horn and rode at ease.

But his face changed color, his whole manner was that of terror when suddenly directly before his horse stepped Buffalo Bill, his rifle ready and covering him, and the words were heard:

"Halt!"

"Hands up, pard, for I need your aid just now!"

Talbot dared not move a muscle, and his horse halted at the scout's command.

The outlaw saw that he was covered, and he recog-

nized at a glance that he was in very dangerous company.

He did not raise his hands, for he seemed unable to do so, and they hung limp and powerless by his side.

Then the scout stepped forward and quickly disarmed him, at the same time ordering his prisoner to dismount.

Talbot obeyed without a word.

Buffalo Bill had noticed that under the cliff the wind had hollowed out a place in the rocks large enough to hide several horses in, and he at once went there with his prisoner and his animal.

A blanket was taken from under the saddle, and laid down for the horse to stand on, so that his iron-shod hoofs would make no sign, and the head of the animal was covered to prevent his neighing, should any of the other outlaws come in sight.

Then the scout securely bound his prisoner and sat down by his side, his rifle and weapons ready for instant use should he be surprised in his retreat by the coming of any of the outlaw band.

Buffalo Bill had just seated himself by his prisoner, when it suddenly occurred to him that when he had taken the precaution to prevent the horse from betraying his presence there, to any one who might pass, he had left it in the power of the outlaw to do so.

At once he said:

"See here, pard, I wish to have a little talk with you, and there is no time to lose."

"Well?" growled the man, speaking for the first time since his capture.

"Who are you?"

"None o' your business, Buffalo Bill."

"I have decided to make it my business, so it will be well for you to answer, as there is a very small thread between life and death, when a life is in the way."

The prisoner glanced up quickly at this and said:

"Do you intend to kill me?"

"That depends."

"Upon what?"

"Whether I have to or not."

"You wouldn't be coward enough to kill a man at your mercy?"

"Well, I don't know, since I have been studying under you, as you certainly intended to kill me and I was at your mercy, and many a poor fellow has been put out of the way by your gang, yes, and women and children, too, if I am not greatly mistaken."

"I have not killed any one."

"Well, you are in bad company, and that condemns you."

"Besides, I have not forgotten that I was your prisoner."

"And how in the name of Old Nick did you escape?" suddenly asked the man.

"Oh, I got away easily enough.

"You should see that a man's hands are not small enough to slip through irons before you put them on."

"Well, you are clever, but your Patron Saint guided you out of that cavern, as a false step would have sent you to perdition, you bet."

"Well, I did not take the false step."

"You were in luck."

"As I am now in catching you."

"It won't do you any good."

"You think so."

"I know it."

"That depends upon how much you value your life."

"I don't understand you."

"I'll be explicit enough so that you can."

"All right."

"You are my prisoner."

"Sure."

"I have your horse here, and I see that you have a haversack of provisions on your saddle."

"Yes."

"We can eat sparingly, so it will last us to the fort."

"To the fort?"

"Yes, for we can take turn about riding and get there in three days."

"We won't get there."

"Why?"

"You won't get out of this valley with me."

"Are you sure?"

"I am."

"Why not?"

"Well, where you have to pass out is guarded."

"Your passes are not guarded by more than two men at each, and I can play the part of Captain Talbot to get up within range, I guess, and drop the guards on duty."

"Then I'll bring you up and the horses of the guards will aid us, see?"

"Yes, I see," disconsolately said the man.

"Now there is a chance for you to save your life."

"How?"

"Go with me to the fort with the determination to make a clean breast of it about this valley, and you shall go free."

"I won't do it."

"Then you will go to the fort and be hanged."

"I cannot betray my pards."

"You cannot or will not?"

"Both."

"Why?"

"Well, I can't explain why, but it is no use to beg me,

or to threaten, for I'll hang before I betray my comrades."

The scout saw that the man meant what he said.

He said that there was some deep reason, unknown to him why he would not save his life by betraying his companions, but he hoped that he might be induced to change his mind, and so said:

"Well, you shall have the chance of refusing at the fort, or accepting.

"If the former you will surely hang, and we will capture your band without your aid.

"If the latter, then you will be a free man."

"It will be the latter, for I cannot betray my comrades, if I hang for not doing so."

"All right, you shall have the chance of changing your mind.

"Now I must gag you."

"Gag me?" cried the man.

"Yes, for some of your comrades may come this way, and hearing the hoof falls you could call them."

"I won't call out if you—"

"I cannot trust you," and the scout, with his scarf and the handle of his bowie knife securely gagged his prisoner so that he could utter no cry to call for aid should any one pass.

Buffalo Bill had made up his mind to make a break for liberty as soon as it was dark, and not risk the coming back of the Girl Guide who had befriended him.

He would carry his prisoner with him, advance upon the guard, and take his chances in a fight for life with them.

Then, with their horses, and what provisions they must have at the pass with them, he would be able to get along over the desert and make rapid progress in his flight with his prisoner.

With a night's start he could defy pursuit, and if he could not bring his prisoner to terms, and his promise held him from coming back to Death Valley under six months, the knew one whom he could trust as himself, and who would guide a troop of cavalry to the retreat of the outlaws and thus solve the mystery of the dreaded place.

That one was his pard upon many a red trail, his comrade-in-arms and good friend, Frank Powell the Surgeon Scout.

So the scout made up his mind to calmly await the coming of night, when he could act.

Another thing was in his favor he felt, and that was his knowledge of two of the passes, the one where he had entered the valley and the one which the Girl Guide had shown him when he made his escape before.

He could, knowing where they were, leave his horse and prisoner, creep up on foot and get within easy range

of the guards and thus discover how many there were and what he would have to contend with.

The hours passed slowly by to both prisoner and captor, the former being anxious and showing it, though the scout was in equal danger with him.

Toward sunset again the sound of hoofs was heard, but not far enough off for the scout to prepare another surprise from ambush, though he knew but one horse was approaching.

Lying quiet and peering out through a piece of sage brush he had put up before him on the rock, he saw come into sight none other than the chief himself.

"If I had only suspected who it was I would have had him," muttered Buffalo Bill, greatly chagrined at having to allow the chief to go by his retreat.

As before, the chief was masked, and he rode along with the pose and ease of a perfect horseman.

Arriving in front of the scout's position, he urged his horse into a canter and soon disappeared from sight.

"That man was your chief, Talbot.

"I only wish I had suspected who he was, for you would have had company," said the scout.

Gagged as he was, the prisoner could not reply, but his face showed how he regretted that his chief had not suspected his unfortunate position and attempted his rescue.

Having a belief that no one would be following the chief, the scout left his prisoner and sallied forth to look up and down the trail.

He obtained a view down the valley of a couple of miles and saw no one in sight.

As night was casting its shadows now he walked rapidly to a place where he could command a view in the opposite direction, in which he knew lay the retreat of the mysterious men who dwelt in Death Valley.

He got into a position where he could see for half a mile or more, but was only able to cast a hurried glance before shut out by darkness coming on.

That glance, however, showed him that a horseman was approaching.

Was it the chief returning?

Was it the Girl Guide?

Was it one of the band, for he had seen but one?

Whoever it was, he decided he would hold him up, and at once took position behind the larger boulder, where he had stood when Talbot came along.

Buffalo Bill had not long to wait, for he heard the hoof strokes coming nearer, and in a short while the outline of a horse and rider appeared close at hand.

Just as the horseman came within twenty feet of the rock, the scout stepped out, rifle ready, and cried:

"Halt! Hands up!"

"So you are holding me up, are you, Buffalo Bill?"

The shadow of the trees there had prevented the scout from seeing who it was, but he recognized the voice at once and said:

"Oh, no, not intentionally; but I was acting in self-defense, not being sure of your return."

"I promised you I would come."

"True, and I trusted you, yet I did not know what might occur to prevent, and so have acted for myself."

"You recognize the horse I am riding?"

"Yes, my own."

"And your saddle and bridle and outfit as well."

"You have brought my horse, then, for me?"

"Yes; so you are free to go your way, only I will have to guide you by a pass where there is no guard."

"I am at your service, miss, but——"

The scout paused, for there came across his mind that he must tell the young girl of his capture of Talbot.

With her acting as his guide, he could not of course take the prisoner with him, and he now feared that to do so might get the girl into trouble, a thing he was anxious to avoid, after all her kindness to him.

So he hesitated in what he was going to say, seeing which she asked:

"But what, Buffalo Bill?"

"How many passes are there?"

"Five that are guarded, and yet only one that is really the entrance to the valley and known as such.

"You know the valley is surrounded by cliffs, and only here and there are there breaks in them, and these are unknown to all save those who dwell here; but, knowing your skill as a scout and plainsman, the chief has guarded the five passes which it might be possible for you to find your way through, and left but one unguarded.

"That one is known to but three persons, and I am one of the trio."

"And you will guide me that way?"

"Yes, for it is the only way out."

"How many men guard the other passes, for I would just as soon take the chances of breaking through them as not."

"You would be mad to do so, for there are five men now at each pass.

"You know the chief is aware of your prowess, so arranged to prevent any mistake, any escape on your part, for he knows how much depends upon it."

"Well, my kind friend, I have a confession to make to you."

"Yes?" and the girl seemed startled at the words of the scout.

"Yes, I have a prisoner over yonder on the cliff."

"A prisoner?"

"Yes, one of the chief's men!"

"Who?" she eagerly asked.

"The men called him Captain Talbot."

"Ah! when and how did you capture him?"

"I ambushed him here at this rock, held him up, so have my prisoner and his horse safe.

"Had you not appeared as you did, I intended to start with him for the fort to-night."

The girl seemed fretted at what she heard.

She was silent for a moment, and then said, seriously:

"It would have been your death had you made the attempt, for there is but one way you can get out of this valley, Buffalo Bill, and that is through my guidance.

"You must set that man free, or I will not do one thing to help you."

CHAPTER IX

THE AGREEMENT.

Buffalo Bill gazed up into the face of the girl as she spoke, and saw determination stamped upon every feature.

Still he did not wish to give up his advantage gained in his prisoner, and so said:

"Why must I give up one who is a means of safety to me?"

"See here, Buffalo Bill, I have tried to act for your good, and to prove it I kept you from taking the oath demanded of you in the cavern, and I have come now to save your life.

"But there are others to be taken into consideration, and I must act for them as well as for you.

"I have asked you to promise not to come back here within six months."

"And I have agreed to it."

"True, for in that time you may be able to render good service, and I can accomplish certain aims I have in view, but which I cannot make known to you.

"I am acting in what I do for you, to save your life and the lives of others."

"You have shown that."

"Now you tell me you have as prisoner the most desperate man in this valley."

"How many are here?"

"That I will not tell you."

"As you please."

"With Talbot your prisoner, I frankly tell you that you shall not leave this valley, and I mean it."

The scout laughed, but said:

"I owe it to you, of course, to be governed by you in this; but how am I to release the man, and he not know that I am befriended by you?"

She was thoughtful for an instant and then said:

"Let me tell you just how you can do it."

"Had we best not go to one side, for fear of some one passing here?"

"No, for not a man of the outfit will ride through this valley at night."

"Indeed! yet why?"

"I cannot explain their superstitious dread of the valley, but certain it is the chief, if not compelled to do so, will not pass through this valley at night."

"That is strange; but are we safe here?"

"Yes."

"And my prisoner?"

"You remain here for some little time, and then return to him.

"Bring him here, then, and let him understand that you have secured your own horse and will not take the chances of taking him out with you.

"Let him know that you are aware of a way of leaving the valley, and say that he must remain here bound until his comrades come along to-morrow to release him."

"Then I am to leave here?"

"You are."

"I could just as well take him along with me."

"Never with my consent."

"Then I yield to you."

"I am glad to have you say so, for I do not wish to regret having served you, through any act of yours, Buffalo Bill."

"I am ready now to obey your commands."

"Well, here is your horse, and your haversack is full, and your canteen also, so that you will not suffer.

"Your horse and all were put in the corral, the men not expecting you to again get possession of him, so I went after him early and so secured him.

"When you bring your prisoner here, he will see that you have your horse and suppose that you went after him.

"It will be a terrible night for Talbot to spend here alone, for he, too, dreads the darkness in this valley; but I guess he will survive it.

"Now let me say that when you leave your man here, mount your horse and come on up the trail until I join you."

"I will do so."

"I will wait for you a quarter of a mile from here, and put you on the trail to get out of the valley by the secret pass I spoke of."

"You are very kind."

"No, I am only just.

"But there is one thing you must submit to."

"What is that?"

"When I meet you up the trail I shall blindfold you,

and only when you are out of the valley will I remove the bandage from your eyes.

"You agree to this, do you not?"

"Yes."

"I will see that no harm befalls you, as before."

"Now I will walk on down the trail, and you leave your horse here and go after your prisoner."

"Will I have been gone long enough for him to feel that I have had time to go where they had put my horse?"

"Yes, it is not far from here," and the girl walked away, while Buffalo Bill having hitched his horse to a tree near by went toward the cliffs where he had left his prisoner.

"Well, Talbot, I am back again, and in spite of your boasted watchfulness and having a good-sized band, I have been able to secure my captured horse and outfit," said Buffalo Bill, as he reached the side of his prisoner.

Of course the outlaw could not reply, but the scout sat down by his side and began to remove the gag from his mouth, while he continued:

"Now you may be right that I could not break through the guards at the passes, that they would prove too strong for me, so I will change my plans and leave by a way where there are no sentinels on duty."

"You cannot find such a way, for there is none," said the outlaw, getting the use once more of his power of speech, though his voice was husky and throat dry.

"I'll take chances on doing so, and I only regret I will be unable to take you with me."

"You will not kill me?" gasped the man, excitedly.

"Oh, no, I am no murderer, though I believe you deserve death if ever a man did."

"I shall leave you bound in the trail until your comrades find you."

"I can but thank you for what you are compelled to do."

"Well, we may meet again some day, and any indebtedness you may consider me under to you I will endeavor to cancel."

"You are not out of the valley yet."

"True, yet I soon will be."

"If you care to make a bet on it I'll wager a clean hundred you do not get out."

"I'll take the bet, and when we meet again will pay it if I lose, or collect from you if I win."

"It's a bargain."

"But why won't you let me go on to my camp?"

"I prefer to get a good start on my way before my getting out of the valley is known."

The outlaw made no reply, and Buffalo Bill aided him to mount his horse, then bound his feet securely to the saddle and started for the boulder.

The outlaw saw then the horse of the scout, and any doubt he might have had as to his having secured the animal faded from his mind, and he said:

"You have indeed got your horse."

"Oh, yes, I am not afraid to travel by night as you and your men are."

"Why, you are as superstitious about the night as Indians are."

"What makes you think we will not move at night?"

"Do you?"

"I have no answer to make."

"Well, you may be sure that you will not travel this night," and Buffalo Bill hitched his horse to a tree in such a way as to thoroughly secure him.

"Now, Talbot, I'll be off, and let me warn you that our next meeting may not terminate as this has done, for it will be your life or mine."

"It will be your life, Buffalo Bill; and I'll win my bet of a hundred."

"You do not intend to gag me again, I hope?"

"Yes, for you will be unable to call for help, and you know there are men not very far away— Hold! if you dare to raise your voice now I'll drive my bowie-knife to the hilt in your heart," and the scout whipped out the long blade and held it over the man, who had intended to call for help.

But the determined act of Buffalo Bill checked him very quickly, and he remained silent.

With a stick and scarf the scout once more securely gagged his prisoner, after which he mounted his own horse and rode on up the trail, to the surprise of Talbot, going toward the retreat of the outlaws.

A quarter of a mile down the trail Buffalo Bill came upon the Girl Guide standing in his path and awaiting his coming.

"You have not harmed him?" she asked, quickly, as he rode up and dismounted.

"I could no more harm a man at my mercy, miss, than I could strike you," was the reproachful response of the scout.

"I beg you to forgive me."

"Certainly."

"I left him tied to his horse, and gagged, to await release in the morning."

"Very well, come with me now, as soon as I have blindfolded you."

"You will ride, and I will lead your horse, and you are not to speak until I give you permission."

"I shall obey, believe me."

"Then I shall not have to gag you," was the smiling response of Buffalo Bill's mascot.

The fair young guide did not go along as though she dreaded discovery, but with a bold step, leading the scout's horse after her.

She seemed to feel sure in the fact that the mysterious dwellers in Death Valley would not go abroad after nightfall, and that she would meet no one to cause alarm.

She turned from the trail she was following, after going a short distance, going up a narrow canyon.

This grew deeper and deeper as she went along until at last the cliffs almost met overhead.

At last, when the darkness grew so intense in the chasm that the stars overhead were all that could be seen, she halted, and the scout heard the lighting of a match, though he could see nothing.

There appeared before her, as she lighted a lantern she carried, what looked like the end of the canyon.

But she went boldly up to the seeming rock and drawing it aside it proved to be a piece of painted canvas, revealing a cave beneath, which was large enough to admit a horse.

"You must dismount here."

The scout did so.

"Now catch hold of my hand, and you lead your horse."

The scout did as directed, and, lantern in hand, the girl led the way through a long cavern that was as keen as a tunnel.

The scout's instinct told him that he was passing through a cave, but he made no remark, simply following his guide, holding the hand she had placed behind her.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, and the cavern seemed to have no end.

But at last there came a breath of fresh, pure air, and the fair guide halted in an opening that overlooked a small stream.

The rocks were so piled up here that the entrance to the cavern could not have been seen fifty feet away.

"Mount here," she said, and Buffalo Bill obeyed, still keeping silence.

"I will have to mount behind you," she said.

"Certainly; can I aid you?"

"No," and she leaped lightly to a seat behind his saddle.

"Now ride straight forward for a few steps and then give your horse his rein."

This Buffalo Bill did, and a hundred yards further on the animal came out of the stream upon a gravel plain, which left no trace of a hoof track.

The girl urged the horse forward for several hundred yards, and then she leaped lightly to the ground, while she said:

"We part here."

"Am I still to remain blindfolded?"

In answer, she removed the bandage from his eyes and said:

"No, you are free now to see what you can, and to go your way at will. Yonder lies the fort, and I would advise that you push right on, for you may be followed."

"I will do so."

"Remember your promise about not coming here for six months."

"I will not forget it, nor will I forget you, and all you have done for me."

The girl made no reply, and so the scout added:

"You have heard nothing of my companion whom I left in the canyon, and who so mysteriously disappeared?"

"Nothing."

"He must have been killed, then?"

"No, or I should have heard of it."

"Good-by, Buffalo Bill," and she extended her hand.

The scout grasped it warmly, and she said:

"Now go, for I will remain here until I see you disappear in the distance."

"Some day we will meet again, and then it will be my chance to aid you."

She was silent, and Buffalo Bill raised his sombrero and rode away, for he felt that she was anxious to get rid of him.

Until his form grew misty in the distance the girl remained standing where he had left her.

Then she retraced her way to the stream, and without a moment's hesitation walked straight into the flowing

waters, which arose to her waist as she crossed to the other shore where she entered the cavern through which she had led Buffalo Bill to safety and freedom.

CHAPTER X.

THE SACRIFICE.

Back through the cavern went the mysterious girl, who, though she would not betray those among whom she dwelt, yet would not allow the life of Buffalo Bill to be forfeited.

She came out of the cave where the canvas protected it from view, walked rapidly down the canyon and turning to the right soon came to a corral in which were a number of horses.

One of these she selected, and springing upon the animal's bare back, rode back to the trail where she had left it to go to the canyon where she was guiding Buffalo Bill.

The nature of the ground just there was such that a trail could be traced by daylight, where elsewhere it could not in the course she had followed in guiding the scout.

She seemed to be as particular in leaving a trail, when she turned off, as she had in the selection of a horse from the corral, for she had secured one that was shod.

Up a winding path she went for half a mile or more, and at last came out upon a ridge which formed a natural wall on the west of Death Valley.

Along this she rode for some distance, and entering a heavy growth of timber, halted on the brink of a precipice.

It was a cliff split in twain, and through it dashed a foaming torrent several hundred feet below.

The roar was terrific as the waters surged along through the rocky chasm, and the spray arose like smoke above the brink of the cliff.

Across this chasm, which was some sixty or seventy feet in width, was a narrow bridge, anchored on either side with ropes to steady it.

A flimsy rail on either side formed the only protection toward going off, and it was not over four feet in width.

Dismounting from her horse, the girl secured him so that he could not stray away, and then walked out upon the bridge.

In the center the flooring had been torn up for the space of ten feet, but the poles that formed it, a flash of her lantern revealed, were upon the other side, ready for use again when needed.

Having noted this fact, she returned to her horse, and, patting him gently upon the neck, said in a voice full of feeling:

"It is a pity to sacrifice you, good horse, but the dumb brute must serve the human being at all times, and Buffalo Bill must be thought dead."

"It must be believed that he escaped this way, and, not knowing that the flooring of this pine bridge was up, rode into the opening, and, with his horse, went down to death."

"Your trail, poor fellow, will be mistaken for that of the scout's horse, and that is what I wish, for no one must be suspected in this matter, for that would mean death to the one upon whom suspicion fell."

She then blindfolded her horse with her scarf, and led him upon the bridge.

Going behind him then she urged him on, and the animal cautiously advanced, the bridge swaying beneath his weight and motion to what would be an alarming extent to one not accustomed to take big chances.

Driving the horse onward the girl guide suddenly sprang backward and ran for the solid bank, for the blindfolded animal had made the step to find nothing but space beneath his hoof, had plunged forward, made a desperate effort to recover himself, and then went headlong through the opening while a loud snort rang out on the night air.

Standing upon the bank the girl covered her eyes with her hands to shut out the dread scene, and then there came to her

ears a cry almost human in its pathetic tone, followed by a loud splash as the horse struck the surging waters and was whirled away by the fierce current.

It was several moments before the girl could collect her nerves and get control of herself again.

But she shook off the feeling upon her and retreated down the steep hill and up the valley.

A few hours after, just as the sun arose above the mountain tops, she was dashing down the valley upon her morning ride which she always took before breakfast.

But this morning she had more of a purpose in view than her ride, for she was dashing down the valley to the spot where the scout had left the bound and gagged outlaw, for to be the first one to find him had been her great desire, when she went to her retreat after the plot to let it be thought that Buffalo Bill had ridden through the opening in the bridge across the chasm.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DISCOVERY.

Talbot had certainly passed a most wretched night of it.

He was superstitious, and so, afraid to be alone there in the valley, which he had aided in giving a very dreadful name.

He was bound in his saddle and gagged, so that he was bodily uncomfortable as well as suffering in mind.

When, after what seemed to him a lifetime of horror, the dawn broke he felt happy, his face lighting up with hope when he saw the sun peering over the mountain.

Some one must soon come along that way, he felt sure, and relieve him from his sad plight.

He was right in his surmise, for some one did soon appear.

It was the mysterious woman who roamed the valley seemingly at will.

She played her part well, for going down the valley at a gallop, she quickly drew rein when she saw Talbot.

Then she reconnoitered before she advanced, but, apparently at last recognizing him, she rode forward and leaping from her horse called out, with well-feigned surprise:

"Why, Talbot, what does this mean?"

The man could only shake his head in reply.

"You, bound and gagged?"

"Have the men done this?"

As she spoke she untied the gag and took it from his mouth, when he gave a deep sigh of relief.

She then hastily gave him a drink from his canteen, and began to untie his feet and hands.

It was not long before he was free, but it was quite a while before he could speak, as his throat and tongue were swollen from the gag.

When at last he could speak his voice was husky, and his first utterance was an oath.

This seemed to cause him to feel better, and he was ready and willing to answer questions, and said:

"I believe I'd have died, Queen, if you had not come along as you did."

"Oh, no, not so bad as that, for you were not hurt."

"But tell me what it means."

"It means that I was held up by Buffalo Bill."

"By Buffalo Bill?"

"Sure."

"But he is a fugitive somewhere in the valley."

"He has left the valley by the bridge trail, for he held me up last night and left me tied while he went to the corral and got his horse and outfit which the men had found in Graveyard Canyon."

"And he has gone?"

"He started up the trail, and if he has not escaped, then he is hiding somewhere in the valley."

"I will ride at once and give the alarm at the retreat," and the girl leaped lightly into her saddle.

"No hurry now, for if he's out, then we cannot catch him, and if he is in the valley then we must catch him, that is all."

"He's a dangerous man, Talbot."

"I should think he was dangerous, and if he's gone, then we will hear from him before very long, I am certain," and the man also mounted his horse and rode back with the girl up the valley.

They had not gone very far when Talbot, who was an excellent trailer, halted and said:

"See there!"

"Yes."

"He has turned off by the bridge trail."

"There are tracks."

"Yes, and we will ride up now to the bridge and see if the trail can be found upon the other side."

They rode up the hill together, and at last came to the bridge across the chasm.

Talbot sprang from his horse, examined the tracks an instant, and then ran eagerly upon the bridge to the gap in it.

A quick glance he gave, and then from his lips broke a wild, exultant yell, while he waved his sombrero around and around his head.

"What is it, Talbot?" cried the girl, also dismounting and joining him where he stood upon the bridge, his face the very picture of joy.

His answer came in tones that could not be mistaken in their joyousness:

"The bridge gap was open and Buffalo Bill rode to his doom! See his horse went down here, carrying his rider to perdition."

"Hurrah! hurrah!" and the man shouted loudly in his fiendish delight at the supposed death of his implacable foe.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

While Talbot was rejoicing over the belief that Buffalo Bill had ridden to his doom, through the gap in the swinging bridge, the scout was pressing along on his way to the fort, leaving far behind him the dangerous and mysterious Death Valley.

When left by the Girl Guide to go his way alone, he had continued on at a slow pace, now and then glancing back to see if his mascot was out of sight.

At last he said with considerable earnestness:

"Well! I am at last safe out of that really fatal valley, and I owe it to that young girl that I am now alive."

"What a Death Valley it really is, and who are the mysterious dwellers there?"

"Outlaws, of course, yet what keeps them there, for whom have they to prey upon in that faraway region?"

"I feel that there is some deep mystery underlying all this that it is hard to fathom."

"But fathomed it must be, and though I promised the girl I would not return for six months, I did not say that no one else would."

"She stated her time, and meant to have matters so at the end of six months that there would be no mystery there then to hunt down."

"That man who thought I repeated the oath after him, the girl, the chief, and the band of outlaws all have some strong reason for sojourning there, and what it is shall be known, though I am unable to go on the hunt for it."

"But I know who will, and that is Frank Powell, the Surgeon Scout."

"He is about the best man I know to follow a blind trail, and I'll just draw him a map of the valley, give him all the information I can, and he can dash in there at dawn some morning with a troop of cavalry, and wipe out the outlaws and have their secret."

"Come, old horse, you have had a good rest, so now push for the fort with all the speed you can make it in."

He urged his horse into a canter, and over the barren plain kept the gait up for hour after hour.

It was after many an hour's travel that Buffalo Bill finally reached a country in which he knew he was safe. But at length his long journey was over, and he could lay himself down to sleep in peace.

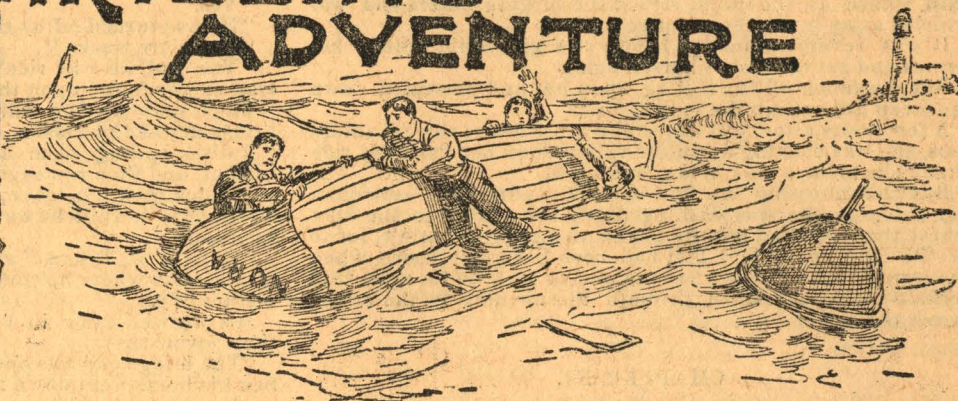
Buffalo Bill has had many startling adventures and made many warm friends, but he has never forgotten the "Mascot," who saved his life in Death Valley.

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 57) will contain "Buffalo Bill and the Surgeon Scout; or, The Brave Dumb Messenger." Read it, boys, if you want to know how the mystery of Death Valley was finally solved.



THRILLING ADVENTURE



Steady now, boys! The new contest has made a splendid start. Now is the time to do your best work. Send in as many stories as you like. There must, of course, be a separate coupon with each story.

Remember that the neatness, legibility and general appearance of your contribution will count when the judges award the prizes.

If you don't know all about this contest look on page 32.

The Great Jacksonville Fire.

(By A. Monroe, Ackerman, Florida.)

I live in Jacksonville, Fla., and most likely you heard of the great fire we had here about a year ago. Well, it started at 12:30 noon, and by 8:30 p. m. had consumed 148 blocks and the loss was \$15,000,000.

I had a very exciting adventure in the fire. I was at school when it started, and the fire was a mile and a half from my house, so I thought that I would go and help my aunt, so I went up there and helped her and when the house in back of her was afire I saw a little girl on the upstairs porch, so I ran and got her down and carried her to her grandmother's house.

Then I tried to get back to my house. I crossed a little creek and was on my way back when I looked around and saw that all behind me was on fire, so I looked and found myself surrounded by fire. I saw one place to escape and that was the creek. I can't swim.

I was running for the creek when I saw a cracker box, and I stopped and looked in it and I saw a mother rabbit with nine little young rabbits. I picked it up and ran with it for the creek, and then threw it in, and I jumped with a boat and picked one up, so I saved a little girl and a rabbit and nine young ones and myself from the great Jacksonville fire.

In a Runaway.

(By C. A. Boone, Mich.)

The incident of which I write happened on the 26th of July, 1901. The day was fine, with a little breeze stirring, and Mr. Rolin Case and a neighbor and myself concluded to visit a city four miles distant. Mr. Case had a pair of burros, which he intended to drive. He knew they were scarey and would run off, but being of a wild Western nature he would risk them.

So we started. We arrived at our destination all O. K., and after a few hours' stay we started home. All went well until nearly home when a trace came loose. We stopped, Mr. Case and I getting out to fix it, leaving our friend, Mr. Ward, to hold them.

We were scarcely out of the rig when a piece of paper came soaring along and dropped between the burros. They were off in an instant. Mr. Ward (being a little short man of the four-foot class) was not able to hold them, so on they went, leaving Mr. Case and myself to imagine the results. We could hear Ward calling: "Whoa, there!" but in vain, for we could hear them thundering down the road, and we expected our friend would be killed.

Soon we heard a crash, and we realized what happened.

We arrived on the spot as soon as possible, and found that the buggy pole came down and ran into the ground, breaking in two.

The sudden stop threw Mr. Ward out, and caused the Burros to break loose and vanish in the darkness. We found our friend half dazed from his fall. Picking him up, we went to a house and rubbed his bruises with cod liver oil and other liniments which were recommended for the purpose, after which we started for home, leaving our broken rig behind.

We were all glad we got out of it as we did, but it was a narrow escape from death.

Nearly Shot.

(By George Barton, N. M.)

One day last spring, taking my gun and dog, I started out on a little hunt "on my own account," as the hunters term it.

I soon came upon Sylvester Brown and Berten Wood, who were out gathering sap. Berten's father owned a

sap orchard, and had a shed where they boiled the sap. Berten gathered the sap and we started for the shed.

When we arrived there a lad by the name of William Scott was there with a repeating rifle which was a new one.

Sylvester wanted to examine it, but Will told him it would go off if he fooled with it.

But as he insisted, he gave it to him, but told him he must be careful and not touch the little catch which he showed him.

I was standing in front of him as he took the gun.

I saw it was pointed directly toward me. I stepped back and as I did so there was a flash, a report, and the bullet just grazed my head. Sylvester had accidentally touched the catch and it had gone off.

He was as white as a sheet, for he thought he had killed me. After staying a while at the shed I returned home none the worse for my adventure.

On the Ice.

(By Geo. Cusick, Ill.)

It was a cold winter day, and I was longing to be on the ice. I went to my friend's house, who lived near the graveyard. I proposed that we should slide on the lake situated near the graveyard, and which had no bottom. Away we went and were soon on the ice. Near the north end of the lake about fifty feet from shore there was a cracking sound—the ice was beginning to break. We were awestruck and did not know what to do. My brother, who was on shore, called to us and told us to run ashore, which we did. I would not go on the ice for a while after that.

A Narrow Escape from Drowning.

(By Paul Lowry Stern, Pa.)

One day a friend and myself went down to the river, which is very wide at this place, and got our old boat and rowed out to the sixth pier. All at once we heard thunder, but we did not think anything about it. So we tied our boat and started to fish. In a short time it began to rain, the white caps coming down the river and the waves growing larger showed us our danger, and before we knew it we could not get back to shore.

There was also danger of going over the dam, which was a short distance below us. We waited quite a while and finding the storm was going to keep up we started for shore, and after some hard pulling we got there. The men on the bridge were watching us and thought we would surely be drowned. I tell you I was glad to get home to my mother, and haven't been in a boat since.

Adventure with a Locomotive.

(By Le Roy White, Texas.)

One summer evening as some friends and I were walking down the Texas and Pacific Railway track about two miles from my home, we came to a trestle and started over.

As we neared the middle we heard the whistle of a train around the curve not 300 yards away. The other boys ran for the end, but another boy and I were not as fortunate as they were. As we were about half way to the end, we stumbled over each other and fell between the ties. The train was nearly upon us in a twinkling, but I managed to push myself and the boy off as the train shot past.

Saved by a Chimney.

(By John Hurley, Massachusetts.)

One morning (April 3, 1902) a startling announcement was seen in one of the morning papers stating that a figure all in white was seen on a roof on Springfield street, at 12 o'clock in the night. The next night a number of other boys and myself went to see the ghost. It was just beginning to rain when we went up on the slanting roof of a house and sat talking. All of a sudden I slipped, a cry of horror came from my companions. I gave one look behind me and fainted. When I awoke I was in my bed at home.

I had got caught in between the roof and chimney and was taken down by the help of some ladders and men. After that there has been no more ghosts on Springfield street.

Tumbling Down a Mountain.

(By Raymond Garrison, N. Y.)

One day near Christmas six boys, including myself, went up in the mountain for birch, but we didn't find any. Then one of the boys said he knew where there was some on top of the mountain, so the two largest boys said they would stay down while we went up on top and got some birch.

Well, we started for the top. The mountain was icy that day, and when we got near the top the littlest fellow slipped, and I being the nearest to him made a grab for him, but just then my foot slipped and I fell. We both went tumbling headfirst down the mountain. When we got to the bottom the two fellows came running out. The other fellow didn't get hurt much, but they had to carry me home and I had five cuts in my head. The doctor put eighteen stitches therein. That's all I wanted.

A Sea Yarn.

(By John Madden, Mass.)

About three weeks before Thanksgiving in 1899 I went out for a trip in the schooner Sylvester Whalen. We got our bait at the wharf and sailed straight to the fishing grounds. When we got there it was foggy and dark. The next morning it cleared up and we made two sets that day. The next afternoon we made another set. In all, we had about 50,000 pounds of mixed fish. That night it was as clear as a whistle. All the men were baiting up for the next day. There were three of us on deck.

All of a sudden we heard the watch yell, "Hard up!"

and the man at the wheel put it "hard down," and a big four-master came crashing into us and almost cut us in two. I gave a yell down the forehold to the men who were baiting, because it was too cold to bait on deck. "All hands on deck and save your lives." They all heard the bump, but thought we ran into a log. They all came on deck and I was standing near the foremast when it came down.

It just grazed my head and tangled me all up in the rigging.

Two men were killed and all hands were safe on the four-master. The fishing schooner, Harry L. Beldon, came along and took me off.

A Peculiar Snake.

(By Herbert Cross, Illinois.)

Just on the boundary line of Illinois and Indiana I was walking down a hill. All of a sudden I heard a hissing sound behind me. I looked around and saw a snake just biting the end of his tail.

In the twinkle of the eye the snake was erect and in hoop form. I did not know what to do nor where to run. At length the snake came rolling along after me.

I had a belt under my coat with a .38-caliber revolver in a holster that was attached to the belt. The first thought was of the gun.

My companions nicknamed me, "Dead Shot."

I took out the gun and without waiting to let the snake get the best of me I shot, but before I knew it the snake hit my toe, but did not injure me. Anyway, I fell down and the snake came crawling over me toward my face.


I reached out for my gun and fired four times. The shots now took effect, so I dropped my gun and seized the snake and threw him off of me and got up. The snake came on like a hoop once more. I looked at my gun, I had one more pill in it. The snake was twenty feet away. I fired. It cut the hoop. I ran over to see where I hit it. I hit it square between the eyes.

In the Woods.

(By Leon Zeglio, N. Y.)

One day when I was in school some of the boys suggested that we go in the woods, so off we started. I was in the lead and was just going through some grass when I heard it rustle and a big snake jumped in front of me.

I jumped aside in time to save myself. As the snake jumped I ran through the woods and arrived at school all out of breath. One of the big boys killed the snake. It was about one inch in diameter and about two and a half feet long, and it was a copperhead. I wouldn't have been writing this if he had bitten me. I keep a good lookout when I go in the woods now.

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All entries must be in before September 1. The contest closes on that date.

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Look on the back cover of No. 52 for photograph and description of one of the prizes.

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